

Dr. Hanna Banting



The
Abused Woman
and Her Pain

For the Unhappily Married Woman, Her Friend,
Counsellor, Lawyer, Student, and Police Officer

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Her Friend, Counsellor, Lawyer,
Student, and Police Officer*

DR. HANNA BANTING



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Introduction

THE AIM of this book is to enable people from different walks of life to understand what the victim of domestic violence experiences and how to assist that person.

If you, the reader of this book, are a counsellor or a friend, you will touch her and offer her a new world where she gathers new strength to survive, live a new life, and flourish. An abused person needs skilled assistance to rebuild feelings of control and self-esteem. She needs to overcome fears, clarify feelings, understand options, and make rational decisions. You the reader can do so much to move domestic violence out of the shadows and into the spotlight.

Inquiry into this area is not a pleasant task, and is one that society has tried to avoid. You will face and possibly be challenged by your own beliefs and feelings, which will confront your own vulnerability and therefore the task is not an easy one. Crisis work requires an enormous amount of knowledge and information.

The overwhelming majority of victims of domestic violence are women, and in 5 to 10 percent of cases, the victims are men (Zibi 1998 :1). In view of these findings, I have referred the abusive partner by the masculine pronoun and the victim by the feminine.

This book is written with the wish that the subject of domestic violence will be understood by many more people, female as well as male.

Abuse in a domestic situation is the subject of this book, a subject that some people have tried to bring to the attention of the general public. This book tries to do the same.

Most of the aspects of domestic violence have been explained here. The unhappy marriage wherein a woman gets verbally abused. Physical, psychological, and emotional abuse are explained and discussed, as well as the effects domestic violence has on the children.

I have discussed what happens to a husband or partner when he murders his wife, as well as the reverse, when a woman murders her abuser and how unfair the courts still are to the above woman.

Then I have discussed the plight of the aged and the pain they often suffer at the hands of their family. The sexual abuse of young girls is not forgotten and the pain they carry with them throughout their lives, if they do not get counselling when needed.

Domestic violence is now much more in the foreground than it was a decade ago. This book is written with the hope that you, the unhappily married woman, her friend, family, social worker, and other dedicated people, who volunteer to help her, reading this will give you all much more insight in the subject.

Hanna Banting, Ph D.

Chapter 1

What Is Patriarchy?

WHEN WE are introduced to the subject of battered women, we have to question first why it is so acceptable in many societies that many men have little or no respect for women. Laws changed a long time ago and women are declared to have equal status as men. There are laws that state that there is equality between the sexes, but many men take no notice of that; they are aggressive, feel superior to women, and treat them badly. If these men are told that women are equal to them, they see it as an insult.

How Does Gender Oppression Start and Happen?

From birth, boys and girls are treated differently. The first question asked when a child is born is, “What is it? A boy or a girl?” In many countries, a boy is more welcome than a girl. Under the previous regime in China, when people were only allowed one child, many baby girls were murdered, drowned in a bucket, straight after birth. A boy was all-important.

It depends on the answer to the question “Is it a boy or a girl” how the newborn is treated from then on. A girl is treated to be feminine and a boy masculine. Masculinity and femininity becomes then part of their gender training.

This process carries on during one's whole lifetime. Just imagine what your life would have been like if you had been born the opposite sex. I am sure, and I speak here for myself as well, our entire lives would have been different.

What Is the Meaning of Gender?

In order to understand why women are oppressed, we have to understand the concept of "gender." We have two kinds of differences between men and women. The first one is biological; our cells have either xx or xy chromosomes, which make us either female or male. The biological difference is that a man impregnates the woman, who later on bears a child. This is the physical difference.

Gender, on the other hand, is not physical. It is psychological, our mannerism and how our habits are. It is how we are trained to behave, the way society has formed us to behave in either a masculine or feminine way. Masculine in this way means: tough, aggressive, assertive, and the ability to be a leader. Feminine is seen as gentle, submissive, and caring for others. This is seen as "natural" for women, and not for men. These roles are created by social pressure and conditioning, from a very young age. Through gender differentiation, women are oppressed and men receive preferential treatment as the decision makers and rulers of the world.

Many women have fewer advantages in the world's job markets, and after a busy day at work, she is still expected to do a full day's work at home as well, while her husband relaxes and puts his feet up, after his busy day at work. Women, therefore, work much longer hours than men, but their opinions are often not appreciated. Most of the time they are lower on the status ladder than men in our society. Women are often employed in low-paying jobs and seldom hold a position of authority over men. She faces many obstacles when she tries for promotion, for it is often accepted as natural that women do lower paid jobs than many men.

If a woman stays at home full-time to rear her children and do

the housework as well, this is often seen by many men as not of any importance, and is often undervalued and scarcely rewarded, despite the fact that this is a vital part of society's well being. A mother and housewife rears the leaders of the next generation.

In many countries, girls are not given the same sort of education as boys. It is accepted in these countries that girls will get married and rear a family, which is often seen by the men of these countries as not of much importance.

As society has forced the issue of gender training, where women are expected to be kind, gentle, and submissive, the men reared in these societies see women as helpless and weak and in great need of a man's superior qualities and protection. The opposite is often true; if a woman escapes such a man, she and her children are often better off, which is a real insult to this man, who discovers that his so-called "inferior" woman can make it on her own.

Patriarchy

This is a Latin word, which means "Father's Right." A patriarchal society means that the man is the head of the household. His wife and children are his property, they take his surname, and his status, as the status of the family. In this social system, he rules over his wife (and sometimes, wives), and the only right she has is to accept the status-quo. There is little she can do to change the situation.

Patriarchy has been in this world for thousands of years, and is still accepted as normal in many countries. Although laws that abolish patriarchy have been instituted for a long time, individual men have not all abolished patriarchy and they willingly and happily implement their own form of patriarchy at home.

Laws are written by men in most countries worldwide. Men ruled over their wives and children, and still in all countries we find to a more or lesser degree that there are patriarchal men who rule their families, and especially their wives, by oppression and aggression. Women's oppression is still widely accepted as normal, so

normal that many TV films and comedies accept patriarchy as normal, or sometimes as in comedies, something to laugh at, but not to change. Laws have changed, but men's habits have not all changed.

It was and often still is that men are seen as far superior to women, and were, and still are the decision makers in the world. Women are often seen as less capable in society. We find that men are the ruling class. They are in charge of companies and government, they control the army and most political parties, they rule over cities as our mayors, they control harbours, decide where to build skyscrapers and highways. It is found that most top positions are held by men, and most of the top salaries are earned by men.

By many men, men are seen as superior to women, and to them it is natural that they make the major decisions in the world and that women should depend on men, as they are less capable.

Men are usually the ruling class. They are in charge of the army, religion, the police force, agriculture, business and financial institutions, as well as government; they rule the world, cities, countries, and harbours in most countries of the world.

Although we find that a lot of women work in organisations, banks, and factories, men are the ones that usually hold the top positions. Because of these sexist practices, men get paid higher wages, and are found at the top. To hold the top positions is a sexist practice.

In many societies the world over, when a woman gets married she is seen as a man's property. In South Africa a black man pays a large amount of money to the father of his future bride. This is called lobola, and after a while he will say to his wife, "I have paid good money for you, now do what I say." These husbands rule over their women, and this happens in many other countries. He rules over his wife and because it is all done in secret, no law enforcement protects them. If this man is wealthy he can buy himself more wives, if he so wishes. In many other countries the man might not

have to pay money for his bride, but the attitude towards his wife, or wives, is the same.

Many men, when together in a bar or some other place, often openly insult a woman, calling her “bitch.” The men do it for fun, but it hurts the woman, which it is meant to do. For the men it is nothing more than a power game.

A Negative Self-Image

Many women have a negative self-image, which was developed from their youth, or sometimes older through the treatment received as a child or a married woman when they were made to feel worthless. It often starts with rape. When the child gets raped or sexually abused, she loses her self-value; she feels as if she has no worth. However, rape or sexual abuse is not the only culprit. In some families a girl is often not as important as her brother. The girl in this situation is often not loved at all or loved less than her brother. These girls feel that they have no importance, no value, and that no one finds them loveable.

Men usually benefit through the access of resources. Boys and girls both have the opportunity for further education, but there are still parents who think or say, “I am not going to waste my money on a girl to study, she gets married anyway, so what good does an expensive education do.” Many people the world over have that attitude. When such a girl grows up, she might get married and rear her children, but there comes a time when she wants to enter the job market and, with her lack of advanced education, she finds that she is at the bottom of the job market. If she had an advanced education, she would be able to be successful, like her brother.

Not all women are in that category anymore. The number of well-educated women is rising and many women make a success of life.

If a woman, not highly educated, is abused in her marriage, there is a constant worry of not being able to get a well paying job, and

the possibility of being independent and creating a good life for herself. The world is divided between gender, male or female. Gender decides where to build highways, how city planning is done, and whether to declare war or not.

In our worldwide society, unequal relations on the domestic front still exist. Women often get raped, even by their own husbands, and no one stops it, as women very often do not report rape. Gender un-equality is the cause of this. Patriarchy is still the norm in many societies. Laws may have changed a long time ago, but men's attitudes have not changed; old habits die hard. Everyone has basic human rights, but men have often not given up their "old rights," as they prefer to call it. Because the man in a household usually brings home the only, or the biggest pay check, he feels that "money talks," and because of that he should be the boss at home.

This often causes violence in the home, violence that is against the woman and sometimes the children as well. This is a violation of human rights. With violence in the home we cannot expect to have freedom, peace, and justice in this world, because the world is made up of families.

Women just accept male dominance and their privileged lifestyle. Many women are powerless and their practical needs such as the survival of the family are foremost on her mind, which makes her shove aside her feelings that she is in a disadvantaged situation and she is not given the opportunity to change her inferior status. On the other hand, women are often too scared to rebel against the treatment they receive, even when the brutal treatment is totally uncalled for. There are many forms of violence: physical, verbal, and psychological. Chauvinists think they can get away with it. They think that rude language is quite acceptable to keep the woman in her "place." Rude behaviour, on the other hand, makes a woman quite powerless.

In South Africa, an organisation called Khuphuka was stationed

in Durban. It was sponsored by the community and women were trained as bricklayers, carpenters, plumbers, and tilers. They had to pay 2 pounds a week to take part; the money was to buy materials. The women in this organisation built houses for one another. Unfortunately, 20 percent of the women who were trained were not allowed to take part and build houses for themselves, as they had to wear pants or overalls, and their men forbade them to do such a thing.

People accept that authority is usually institutional power, and men and women forget that men's authority goes mostly unquestioned, because people accept it as "normal." In patriarchal societies, which most of them are, woman's power exists within the boundary of man's authority. This goes mostly unquestioned.

Then there is capitalism, which is widespread in this world. It is a system where the money and goods are owned privately and the workers, male and female, get paid, but women very often fill the low-status jobs, and are often exploited by the companies, as younger women are seen as temporary workers, as it is felt that she won't work for many years, as she will probably fall pregnant and has to stop working for a while. Well, I ask, someone has to have the babies, in order that we have a new generation. Most feminists point out that our capitalist society oppresses women in the work place.

Through conditioning we get reinforced in what is expected from us, this could be positive, but it is often negative. As women we have become so accustomed to the way we live. We might hear on the radio or see on TV how our way of living should be, but newscasts do in many instances not make much impact of how man's vision of the situation should change.

It is still in the hands of the men we live in close contact with, such as father, grandfather, uncles, husband, and our male boss, how women should be treated. Through their conditioning, we as women have become accustomed to how we should live. Our

feelings and emotions are quite often reinforced by men.

We should empower women to receive legal power as well as authority. To empower a woman means that effort should be made to allow her to be free, to make her own decisions, and change things that cause her grief, in whatever form. If she has new ideas, these should be appreciated and not pooh-poohed, as if a woman is not allowed to think or create new ideas.

In education, we should open up new and young minds, that girls are just as precious as boys, and that later on in tertiary education, we should open up new minds, by what patriarchy is and how it should be abolished. Young men must be taught that women are equal to men, and if they laugh at such a statement, they should be told that women are just as intelligent and capable as men. We have to educate our youngsters to a new way of life in which women are at last appreciated in every way. Youngsters who see women abused at home are especially vulnerable, because they get the wrong example at home on how a woman should be treated, i.e. with dignity and kindness.

A new and positive way of treating women involves new ideas and an end to sexism and abuse. To change a man who is already abusive, for him to think differently, change his chauvinistic attitude towards women, is very difficult, as he feels that it does not profit him anything. He prefers his status quo, where he is the boss, and has all the say.

Women should be empowered, which means that they have legal power and have authority over their own lives. It also means that new ideas are formed, as well as new understanding and new knowledge of their unwanted situation. Empowerment of women should be taught at school, for there are children who get the wrong example at home, and these children could become the woman abusers, or the abuse victims of the future.

Feminism, which is a social movement, wants to change the traditional role and image of women. It seeks to end sexism, and wants

women to attain equal rights with men. Society should understand a woman's point of view, although there are many women who are all different, but fair treatment is wished by all. The emphasis should be on how precious women are. Not all men are sexist. There are many men who treat their wives well with loving kindness. These are not the men discussed in this book. Many men want all women to receive fair treatment. These men are called pro-feminist.

Then there is Cultural Feminism, which sees gender as a historical movement, which has been the norm in history, also called patriarchy. Feminists have been lobbying for many years in a lot of countries to improve the status of women, but there are still many countries in this world where patriarchy is the norm. It will take time for this to change, but even little changes in these countries are important and a small step forwards. Feminism is a movement that is not welcome in many societies. Think of Africa, as well as the Moslem communities, where few women are free to decide on how they want to live their lives. In these communities, feminism is seen as a revolutionary movement and is not welcome.

By Whom Is Woman's Oppression Challenged?

Gender training is a form of brainwashing and many educated people have opposed it in the last century. Books and articles all over the Western world have been written on gender training, and the patriarchy that existed then, a hundred or so years ago. Still not much has been done, yet there are many men, even in our so-called modern western world, who stick to patriarchy or sexism today. Many women in this modern part of the world are still badly treated by their husbands or partners, and these women, are so caught up in their situation that they do not see a way out of it. Many women the world over are subordinate to men. Many men do not want to change this, for it suits them that they are the rulers over their families, as well as in the workplace.

These are some of our rights:

I have the right to state my own needs and set my own priorities as a person independent of any roles I may assume in my life (knowing that other people have the same right).

I have the right to be treated with respect and dignity as a capable and equal human being.

I have the right to express what I feel and think.

I have the right to say yes or no for myself.

I have the right to say, "I do not understand."

I have the right to change my mind.

I have the right to say what I need, and ask for what I want.

I have the right to deal with others without being dependent on them for approval.

I have the right to make mistakes.

I have the right to move around freely without restriction.

I have the right to be safe.

I have the right to be treated equally and fairly before the law"
(Mackenzie 1995:40).

And then there is violence:

"Until the latter part of the nineteenth century, women in Britain were bound by law to stay with their husbands, however brutally they were treated. If they ran away from home, their husbands had every right to drag them back again if need be, lock them up to prevent their future escape. But in 1870 Francis Power Cobble, a Victorian feminist and philanthropic worker, wrote a pamphlet, called: 'Wife Torture'. This pamphlet crystallized a growing unhappiness with the law, among many thinking men and women, and in 1878 Francis Cobble had the pleasure of seeing the Matrimonial Causes Act passed, enabling magistrates to grant judicial separation with maintenance and custody of the children, to wives whose husbands had seriously assaulted them" (Renvoize 1979: 29).

The result of brutal treatment on the part of the husband destroys the wife's ability to analyse the situation and make decisions on what is important to her, and then act upon it. Violence in the home causes the woman to feel that she is trapped and she does not see a way out. Even now more than 130 years later, many wives are still battered by their husbands as though Francis Cobble and what she has achieved has never existed.

“Men kick, bite, and use their fists to inflict damage. Gayford reports that all the one hundred women in his sample had been struck with a clenched fist, and fifty-nine were also repeatedly kicked. Forty-four suffered lacerations, seventeen of these being caused by instruments such as: razors, knives, or broken bottles. Nineteen women reported attempts to strangle them and two attempts to suffocate them. Twenty-four had fractures of ribs, nose, or teeth, and four had their shoulders or jaws dislocated. Nine were taken to hospital after being found unconscious. Two were left with defective vision and two claimed that their epilepsy was the result of head injuries. In forty-two cases weapons of some kind were used” (Renvoize 1979: 33).

When a husband becomes angry and if he loses his temper, he might hit his wife, and, if he is so inclined, punch her and throw her on the floor. Many pregnant women lose their unborn child when they get kicked in the abdomen. When the husband is jealous of the unborn baby, because he finds that this baby gets a lot of attention from the pregnant mother-to-be, they might kick her repeatedly in the stomach to get rid of the young unborn child. His jealousy is like a madness. When he is under the influence of alcohol, he often loses all reason and bangs the wife's head on the floor and behaves violently in many different ways. Alcohol lowers his frustration tolerance, and a husband who comes home drunk often takes out his frustrations on the defenceless woman. If this man had not been drinking, he might have very well not taken out his anger to such an extent; he might just have yelled at her.

Alcohol does not make a man violent. There are many men who drink and never lay a finger on their wives, but the violent man who drinks gives alcohol the blame of his behaviour. Aggression is by some understood as reaction to too much alcohol, but this is not the case. The violently inclined man has a choice he can make, whether to beat his wife or just put his feet up and relax until he is sober. It is found that excessive drinking is often related to domestic violence.

Though the consumption of alcohol is linked to domestic violence, it is not the only reason. Gambling on horses or cards can also make a violent man lose his cool. He might win and drinks excessively to celebrate his victory. He might also lose and then drowns his sorrows. He goes home in a foul mood and takes it out on his wife. The smallest request, like the request for housekeeping money, will off-set his mood and he becomes violent. The request irritates him, because he has lost all his money, and the request for money might make him feel that he is criticized or insulted by his wife. The wife might explain that he should not gamble, as it often makes him penniless and she needs the money for food and other necessary items; a fight follows.

A husband chooses to be aggressive and when he has had a bad gambling day, he might take his frustrations out on his defenceless wife. It is often not understood why such a wife does not leave her abuser, but we come to that later on.

‘There is no evidence that marital violence is caused, by what a psychiatrist would call a ‘mental illness’. Wife batterers have no clear correlation with mental illnesses; therefore, we cannot put a ‘mental’ tag on them.”

Faulk, a consultant psychiatrist, categorized the men’s relationships into five types:

- 1) Dependent, passive men whose attempts to pacify their querulous dominating wives would break down sometimes under direct provocation, resulting in a violent attack.

- 2) Dependent, but suspicious type, who is very jealous of his wife, usually unjustly, but whose need for her was too great for him to abandon her. The tension caused by his jealousy would gradually build up and erupt in ever increasing violence.
- 3) Violent and bullying.
- 4) Dominating men with a strong need to prove themselves.
- 5) Husbands who had achieved a stable and affectionate relationship with their wives, but during a period of severe mental disturbance had assaulted their wives (Renvoize 1979: 45).

A husband who suffers from jealousy has often a low self-esteem. He accuses his wife of infidelity and looks at every man his wife meets with hatred. He fantasizes about these men, and believes that his wife is enamoured by them. His fantasies plague him. When he cannot keep quiet any more, he interrogates her. He might beat her and out of despair and fear she “confesses” everything when she cannot take any more beatings. Most of the time she is not guilty, but her brutal husband will kill her, she fears, and she rather agrees with him to stop the beating. He stops beating her when his anger has subsided. This delusional jealousy is very dangerous, as he could kill his wife.

Through his low self-esteem, he just feels that he is not good enough. He sees his wife as being better and smarter than him, and he feels he compares badly with other men. This causes his jealousy. His feelings of inadequacy might also be carried over into his interactions at work. As a youngster he might have been the butt of his peers’ jokes and criticism.

If he goes for counselling, the therapist should help him to build up his self-confidence and teach him to talk things over with his wife and not use his fists when he is angry. This is quite a task, to rid a man of his delusional jealousy and how he judges the world around him, during his fantasies as well.

If the abused wife goes to a therapist, the counsellor or therapist

should help her to make up her mind on the situation. It should be explained to her, how and why her husband sees his world, and why he reacts the way he does. She must also be told that it is not her fault that he abuses her; it is entirely his choice in what he does.

If the wife feels that she cannot take any more abuse, she must be helped to leave. A social worker might help her to get to a safe house, a shelter of her choice, or she might move in with her parents for a while, until she has found a place of her own. Her new address might have to be kept a secret from her husband, so that he cannot further upset her by his pleading for her to come back. His pleading and outward remorse might just be an act. He has found out that he needs his wife to do his housework and satisfy his sex life, but true remorse might not be the case at all. If she goes back to him because she believes him, she might find out after a few weeks that he is the self-same man she had before. His act of remorse was just a game. Therefore, it is important that the abuser does not know his wife's address. The therapist must tell her receptionist this as well.

A woman who has been abused has probably learned how to keep herself safe from the abuse as much as possible. She might have accepted the Stockholm Syndrome, which consists of not fighting the abuser, but please him as much as possible. She has accepted her husband's views of herself as well, i.e. an inferior person. She has discovered that he does not like the interference of other people in his life and/or lifestyle. This is the reason she has isolated herself from friends and family as much as she possibly could. Her view of herself has become totally biased. It is not as she saw herself before, a loving, happy person that she was, but a total failure as a wife.

In this book I try to explain that the abuse she has received and probably still receives is not her fault, but entirely her husband's. The abused woman must accept that she is a wonderful person in awful circumstances. She has to learn to accept this. She has

survived until now, but now is the time that she must believe in herself, and what she should receive to help her is praise. Praise on how she has coped, on the loving and caring person she is, is important.

You have survived the abuse until now, you have been inventive in how you handled the situation, but now is the time for you, the abused woman, to claim back a life where you are appreciated. You have shown great strength in your ability to survive. Don't believe in criticism. You have done too much already to please your husband. He is not easily going to change, but you have to talk to him, and tell him what you don't want, and what you want.

If possible, talk to a friend or go to a counsellor. You need support; isolation is not the answer. Just remember that if you want your husband to change, treating him well only is not going to change him. He has to learn a lesson, which is that abuse, whether verbal, physical, or psychological is not accepted. Not at home and not in society. When he married you, he promised that he would "love" you, and the way he has abused you, is not love. A man who loves his wife does not belittle her, does not criticize her, play jokes on her, or play games in order to hurt her. A loving husband never slaps his wife.

From now on, you have to do what is "right" for you. Doing everything "right" as your husband wants it is not the answer. He might have told you that you should do everything "just the way he wants it," and that is, according to him, when your relationship will work out. That is not true. The treatment you get from him should be "right" for you too. You are not responsible for his bad behaviour and other reactions. Therefore, don't feel guilty when he is unhappy or dissatisfied. It is entirely his choice to live the way he does. He might have had an abusive father, and the wrong upbringing, but he still chooses the way he is.

Maybe at this stage you want to make a long-term decision, such as divorce, but we get to that later on in this book. Read further and

you will find a lot more answers to problems you might not even have been aware of. Tell someone you can trust of your predicament. Someone else's view on your situation might be different to how you see it.

You might also need a good divorce lawyer. If you don't have the money for that now, find out from a social worker or at the police station where you can go for help. If you do want a divorce and you are married in community of property, you will receive 50 percent of the joint estate, and you might receive an amount of money or goods, which would give you a good start. If such is not the case, remember that he will have to pay you an amount every month, by decision of the maintenance court, so you will not be financially destitute. There are many people who can help you in your situation. You need not feel destitute.

When you are beaten up and you phone the police, your abuser will get the message that he cannot get away with his violent behaviour. He might not want to get in trouble with the law. This might be a big step for you in the right direction. Suggest to him that he sees a counsellor or psychologist to help him with his anger management. On the other hand, if you involve the police, he might be so angry with you for involving them that he beats you up again. Don't give up. You will get help when you ask for it.

If you lay a charge of assault to him, you will feel empowered. Your husband, if the law treats him severely, might be too afraid to abuse you again. Even if it is just a few days that he has been locked up, he will have enough time to think on what he has done to you, and he will know that if he is given a suspended sentence, that if he abuses you again, he will be locked up for a couple of years, an awful prospect to him. The court might send him for counselling to learn how to deal with his anger and abuse.

When he gets a suspended sentence and returns home, he might after a while be full of bravado again and beat her once more. She might be too afraid to go to the police to lay a charge against him,

because she does not want him to be locked up, for several reasons, namely where would she live if he were locked up. She might not have a job, or might have only a low-paying one, not enough to rent a flat as well as to support herself and her children, and while he is locked up, his income would stop. She might also be afraid of what he could do to her once he would be released. But she must not allow him to abuse her again. She can get help in many ways.

As an abused woman, you could get a protection order from the court, in which is stated what he is not allowed to do. If you have left the marital home, it will state that he is not allowed to come and see you or stalk you. All communication is through your lawyer, and you will be protected from him, from his begging, pleading, as well as rudeness and other abuse. If he violates the protection order, the police will arrest him.

To obtain a protection order, you will have to go to court and face your abuser there. Your husband's lawyer might interrogate you. Remember, he is paid to set your husband free, and without blame. This is not a very nice experience, but you must realize that you can do it, and that you and your children's future depend on the outcome of the court hearing.

You, the abused woman, could see a counsellor who could help you in explaining the reasons your husband is so aggressive and why you have reacted to the abuse in the way you did, remember the Stockholm Syndrome. There is just one thing: you know your partner best and may be even able to predict how he will react to the court rulings, whether he will take them seriously or not.

When a woman leaves her husband, he will be the loser, and although he was always the winner at home and could do whatever he wished to do, this is not the case any more. He has lost his last battle and will have to face the consequences.

He has treated her badly in the past, but that did not mean to him that he could live without her. He needs her for many reasons and one of them is the "Power" he had over her. She made him feel

like the boss in his little kingdom. He needs her to feel great. He also needs her for the daily housework, something he now misses, as he has to cook and clean for himself. He is angry and decides to contact her. He visits her at home, begs her to come back. He might go to the children's school, and tell them that Daddy still loves Mommy and wants them to come back home. He might phone her repeatedly, he might send her letters or packages, he does not give up easily. He might stalk and threaten her. He might have a gun and she is afraid that he might kill her. He could be drunk sometimes when he stalks her and be even more dangerous, but a restraining or protection order should take care of all that. A therapist, counsellor, or police officer will be able to explain all that to her, which is a great help.

Whatever he does, you, the abused woman, should take his threats seriously and safeguard you and your children from him. It would be better if he did not know where you live, although eventually he will find out where you are, but the longer your address is not known, the better it is, for his immediate anger will have subsided. Death threats should always be taken seriously, and your lawyer, counsellor, police, or social worker should know about them.

He might also tell your friends what horrible things you have been up to. Just tell them the truth and they will possibly believe you.

According to law, he is not allowed to harass you, which means that he repeatedly follows, pursues, or accosts you, and it defines harassment as: "Engaging in a pattern of conduct that includes the fear of harm to the woman, including repeatedly watching or loitering outside of, or near the building or place where she resides, works, carries on business, studies or happens to be; repeatedly making telephone calls or inducing another person to make telephone calls whether or not conversation ensues; repeatedly sending, delivering, or causing the delivery of letters, telegrams, packages,

facsimiles, electronic mail or other objects to the woman” (Justice College 2001: 34).

Threats should always be taken seriously and therefore you, the abused woman, should plan to safeguard yourself and your children from your abuser, and install security on windows and doors if necessary. Change your habits and keep on changing them. How do you go to work? Could you travel with a lift group? Always let someone, family or friends, know where you are, and what you are doing. Explain the situation to the children if they are old enough to understand, but try not to instil fear, although they must stick to the safety drill.

You must, if possible, involve your neighbours. Tell them your situation and ask them to help; when they hear anything unusual, will they phone the police. Above all, do not forget to apply for a protection order.

Because of his volatile and unpredictable nature, an abuser is always dangerous and you, the counsellor or therapist, must help her to gain self-confidence, and with your help she must want to recover, but she has to decide whether she wants to stay with her abuser or leave him. Many such women see divorce as a scary step to take; her entire life centred around her husband and she does not have the confidence to think how she could manage without him. Most of the time he is the sole or main breadwinner and she might not have many qualifications to step into a well-paying job.

Once she can extricate herself from her husband's domineering attitude and his lies, she will grow in strength and decide on the best for her and her children. She must understand patriarchy and how her husband rules her with an iron fist, how he demands total obedience from her and the children, and that his unfair, brutal treatment is not acceptable.

Not all abusers fall within the same category. Domestic violence appears in different forms. There is verbal abuse, where the man is sarcastic, he insults his wife, belittles her, or shouts abuse at her.

Then there is physical abuse, where the man beats his wife in different ways. Psychological abuse is another form. The man plays word games. Whatever he does he claims is just a joke, he insults his wife, plays word games with her and makes her feel inferior. He is aware of how he hurts her, but she accepts the treatment as just, although she feels terrible. Abused women often accept the treatment they receive as normal. When it is pointed out to them that it is abuse, they are often surprised.

The following is how some abusers develop from teenage years, from about the age of fifteen or sixteen. The future woman abuser often gets involved in illegal acts. He might belong to a gang of youngsters who are up to no good. They ignore the law and are involved in much mischief. They cheat for profit, lie to their parents, and don't develop emotionally, neither do they feel any remorse on the evil that they do, or the pain that they inflict on their victims. As they grow older, they use alcohol and/or drugs, which they use to help them to have more courage in their acts of abuse. Their gang is most important to them and they will do anything that the leader asks them to do, which is often theft and physical abuse. Their sexual development and knowledge is limited to the act, and they refuse to accept it as something that involves kindness, gentle feelings, and selfless love.

Alcohol and drugs are not responsible for committing abuse. There are many men who use these and never abuse anyone while under the influence of either alcohol or drugs, but an aggressive man who uses drugs and alcohol is a danger to the poor woman who lives with him.

When you, the abused woman, make plans to escape the situation, you have to take it step by step. To take your neighbours in your confidence could be one step; could they help when there is trouble? Maybe your children could go to them when he, the husband, is abusive to you. Tell the children not to interfere, or "help"

Mommy, when there is trouble. You must leave important documents, such as birth certificates, hospital cards, marriage certificates, school reports, and other certificates with a friend. If you have gone to see a doctor about your bruises or even broken bones, tell him what you need from him, maybe a letter, which states when you have been physically harmed and by whom.

Keep a diary in which you state the threats he has made you, and the physical abuse, as well as other abuse. This will help you later on when you speak to your lawyer, or when you appear in court. Do you have a car? Have a spare set of keys made, as well as spare keys for the house. Spare house keys might be important if at a later stage you want to pack up certain items you need. You must not enter the house alone, but go with the protection of the police. If you or any of your children is on medication, make sure that you have a copy of the prescription.

If you think of leaving, you must plan ahead. If you know when the violence occurs and the reason for it, you know your husband best, and might predict when he could become violent. Speak about this with someone, where you would like to stay over for a while. Tell this person what your husband is like before you plan to leave, and ask whether you would be welcome to stay over until you have found yourself a place to live. Don't wait until he beats you up again; leave before this happens.

A counsellor, social worker, or the police would know where to find a shelter for you and your children. They will help you to find a way to get a job, if you don't have one, and a flat or house to live in, and how to find a lawyer.

You must pack a bag for emergencies, personal items such as photos, jewellery, the children's favourite toys and clothes. Take this bag to the house of a friend where it is safe. If your husband were to find this bag at home, he might get very angry and even destroy the contents.

If your husband has a gun, find out whether it is licensed. Has

he threatened you with it? Tell the police and others, such as your counsellor, social worker, and friend. If it is not licensed, tell the police, who will confiscate an illegal firearm, and who will arrest him for illegal possession of such a firearm. If the gun is licensed, but he has threatened you with it, tell the police, and tell them of his violent behaviour. If he is an irresponsible man and threatened you, his wife, with a firearm, he should not own a gun and the police must be informed.

If you have nowhere to go, as in family or friends, consider to go to a shelter. Ask the police or social worker where you can find one. If you have threatened to commit suicide, you will be sent to a psychiatric hospital, and after that you will be booked into a shelter, until you have found a place to live. You must realize that your stay at a shelter is temporary. Your stay will be from one to six months. A shelter is a place of refuge, and you will receive all the help you need. Shelters have rules you have to stick to. Some of the rules will be that the address and telephone number of the shelter be kept a secret. Visitors are often not allowed and no alcohol or drugs are allowed.

The advantages are that you will meet other women there who have gone more or less through the same circumstances. It can be very helpful to meet these women, as you feel less lonely and share each other's pain, which will help with the healing process. Also when you interact with these women, your feelings of shame that you were maltreated will subside. Being in a shelter will also give you time to analyse, with the help of a social worker or counsellor, what happened to you, and why it happened. You will benefit from the counselling and job-skills programs that they might offer. Your children will also benefit from the therapy they receive there, which will be age-related. To stay in a shelter has many advantages to the abused woman.

If you stay with family or friends, you will need to get yourself a job as soon as possible. One of the reasons is that you might have

to help pay for board and lodgings. Remember that if you have children, there will be lots of extra mouths to feed and food is expensive. You will find it nice to be financially independent and not a burden to anyone.

One of the biggest challenges an abused woman faces is financial independence. Many abused women are totally financially dependent on their abusing husbands, who do not allow her to go out to work for a salary. It is important that such women find themselves a form of income, as soon as they leave the marital home, as well as go to the maintenance court to apply for maintenance, for her and her children.

“According to Gayford, there was little choice in the type of men some of these abused women married. These men grew up most often in a home where violence was accepted as the norm. The place where future couples meet is usually at the local pub, where rough behaviour is often acceptable. The husband often grew up with a father who was the aggressor in the house, therefore he did not have the proper role model, and as soon as his wife irritates him he beats her, like his father used to beat his wife. Many men in that category feel annoyed when his wife is pregnant. The woman’s greatest anxiety is that when pregnant it could endanger the unborn child’s life. He has, on the other hand, no concern for this. He is an insecure man, who just feels jealous of the unborn child and becomes nasty when sex is sometimes withheld in the third trimester” (Renvoize 1979: 60).

For you, the social worker or counsellor, it is important that you help the abused woman to prepare to make use of the legal system. This woman has lived with so much abuse in many forms that she might not be capable of helping herself. The shock to her system is too great. She cannot imagine that she could have a brighter future. There are many items that must be gathered to start a legal case. If she has been to a doctor or hospital because of the abuse, photos of her bruises might have been taken. There

should be hospital records in connection with the physical abuse. This could even include broken bones. Clothes that the victim wore during the abuse, which might be torn or soiled with blood or soiled in other ways, should not be washed but wrapped in paper and not in plastic. If he has written her threatening letters, they must be added; all are important evidence in court. If there are any witnesses to the abuse, they must be asked to testify. All this is important to a court-case. She should get help to get all this together.

Abuse has always been with us, but the victim usually keeps quiet about it. She is ashamed of the abuse and hides her bruises. She does not want anyone to think or find out that her marriage is not a happy one. This woman often isolates herself from family and friends.

“Physical abuse can be defined as unwanted touching or an act that causes fear, bodily harm, or interferes with personal liberty. Physical abuse is not limited to the following:

- 1) Shoving, shaking, hitting, and burning
- 2) Kicking, stabbing, spitting, and throwing the person down
- 3) Pinching, using a weapon, punching, and twisting limbs
- 4) Scratching, depriving of sleep, biting, and hair-pulling
- 5) Slapping, mutilating, stomping, and holding down with force
- 6) Choking, forced sexual acts” (Zibi, 1998: 1).

The injuries a man inflicts upon his wife usually occur to the head, face, ribs, and arms, because a woman often raises her arms to protect herself.

A woman friend of mine in South Africa had a very ugly scar on her one upper arm. I asked her what had happened and she told me the following: Her husband had broken her arm in a vicious attack. They were living on the gold mines and he did not want to go to a regular hospital in case questions were asked. In the middle of the

night, he phoned a friend of his, a male nurse who worked at the Black mine workers hospital. My friend was taken to this hospital and her husband and his friend set her arm without any anaesthetic and the male nurse stitched the wound. The trauma she went through was indescribable.

In some abuse the injuries are mild, without leaving any marks, but other injuries can be very severe. The victim might suffer loss of consciousness, internal injuries, broken bones, such as limbs, nose, loss of teeth, or death. If a husband physically injures his wife, it is found that he might do it again.

Pregnancy is very dangerous for a woman, who has an aggressive husband. Abused women get then more abused than ever, as the man is jealous of the unborn, who receives so much attention from his wife.

I have a friend who has had eight miscarriages, all due to violence. The last one happened when her husband threw her off a driving bus.

Emotional and Verbal Abuse

A woman who came to me for counselling told me that she was just married for some months when she and her husband stood outside under a tree near the kitchen door. He had a gun in his hands, which was nothing unusual, as he was always busy with one of his many guns. He was aiming at something in the tree, above her head, but she was not concerned. Then suddenly a shot went off and all hell broke loose. Her cat fell out of the tree on top of her head. It clawed like mad to keep itself from falling. Then the cat fell at her feet, dead. She ran into the kitchen, blood all over her face and her clothes, hers and the cat's. Her husband was laughing. He had never seen anything that funny.

Verbal abuse could be any of the following:

He could be calling her names and making jokes at her expense. He could threaten her or refuse to talk. He could argue or make

degrading remarks, as well as put-downs. He could withhold affection, play mind games with her, and deny previous abusive words. He could force his partner to act against her will, or he could be yelling, accusing, blaming, and criticizing, as well as judging her unfairly and judging her in a biased way, as well as being demanding: "You do this my way!" He could be minimizing those things that are important to her, intimidating with looks and actions, as well as isolating her from family and friends by criticizing them or in another way. He could also be interfering with his wife's right to determine her own behaviour, i.e. what she likes to do or believes should be her choice. He could be influencing the children through criticism against their mother in a negative way, destroying property or pets, or withholding money for necessary household items and food.

Sexual Abuse

Rape, attempted rape, incest, and unwanted sexual touch are often called sexual assault. Sexual abuse is sexual contact without consent. When it occurs in a marital relationship, it is called marital rape; between friends or acquaintances or dating partners, it is often called acquaintance or date rape.

There are many forms of rape: forced sexual penetration, fondling, grabbing, pinching, using power privileges, squeezing; as long as the woman doesn't want it, it makes no difference with whom it is, where it is, as long as she does not want the sexual act, it is seen as rape or attempted rape. Coercing a wife into having sexual contact with another person is a misuse of the abuser's power.

A woman, who came to me for counselling, told me the following: She had just spent six months in a mental hospital, but she could not be helped there, because she could not tell them her secret. Before she went to the hospital, her husband had forced her to have sex with his friends, one at a time, while he stood by with his video camera. She hated it, but could not do anything about it. She doubted whether the people in the hospital would believe her,

because her husband was there every day, and was so charming towards the staff. The trauma she had suffered was the cause of her stay in the mental home. This motivation for sexual assault is power, not sexual desire, and definitely not love making.

It is important to understand that everyone, wife, lover, or dating partner has the right to say “No” to sexual contact.

Control and Power

In domestic violence, we find that the man has a need to control his partner. He has the belief that he has the right to keep control and power in whatever way necessary.

The control most often starts in a new relationship. He asks her not to spend so much time with her family and friends. This to her seems a reasonable request. He states that he wants to spend more time with her. To the woman this might even sound romantic. As the time passes, his control becomes more severe. He criticizes her behaviour, the clothes she wears, her involvement with the people she works for, until she has no more freedom, but finds herself in an awful situation.

The children who are born in abusive families are often badly influenced by the violence in their homes. They grow up with fear and loneliness. Their father might get angry with them and their mother cannot protect them much. Older boys sometimes seem more loyal to their fathers, as to them, he has the power in the home and they can find protection when they choose him as their favourite parent.

When babies are born into a family where the father is an aggressive person, the baby's crying might upset him. He tells the wife to keep the baby quiet or else he will hit her. She tries, but the crying increases, then she decides to smother the little one with a pillow, with disastrous consequences.

Parents of battered babies often lived with abuse. They are often young, live together or marry to legitimize the baby. They are

often short of money. He might spend a good amount of his meagre pay on the bar where he hangs out with his friends. He is too egotistical to accept responsibility towards his family and chooses, as much as possible, to live the way he lived before he was married or had a child. Both husband and wife might have grown up in abusive families and their early relationship was formed through lovemaking to take away the pain and lack of love that both grew up with.

How She Can Protect Herself

Arrest and prosecution are good deterrents to stop the abuser's violence. The abused woman might still love her husband, for when he does not abuse her, she hopes that the abuse will stop, if she does everything right, and that her love for him, will change his behaviour.

A woman who is abused can take steps to protect herself. She must realize that she is not the only one to suffer, but the children too are affected by his abusive behaviour. Even when they do not witness all the abuse, they are aware of what is happening. Children's behaviour at school, as well, is affected by how the children live at home. Boys might become aggressive towards others at school and on the playground. Many boys who grew up in abusive homes become abusers themselves when grown up.

An abused woman should call in the help of the police when she is in danger. They will see to it that she gets proper medical care, that her husband stops abusing her by a warrant of arrest, a warning by the court, to stop his abuse, or a jail sentence.

Abused women often isolate themselves. They are afraid of confiding in a member of the family or a friend. That the woman keeps quiet gives her husband more power to carry on with his abuse, because no one stands up for her, or criticizes the husband for his bad behaviour.

You, the abused woman for whom I write this book, find someone who will listen to you and help you, and you, her friend,

encourage her to do what is right for her, but always let her make her own decisions.

The Abuser

Not all abusers of domestic violence are the same. There are so many ways to abuse a woman, as I have discussed earlier on. Some men are occasionally abusive, whereas some are often abusive towards their wives and others who might cross their paths. There are those who are only abusive to their wives, while they present a charming personality to all outsiders. These wives feel they cannot find help from friends and family, as it will be difficult for them to be believed, as their husbands are always so charming and friendly. These wives become very isolated with their secret of the pain they suffer.

The Victim

“Being the victim of, or witnessing a traumatic event, produces changes in a person’s thinking or behaviour. These changes are aggravated when the traumatic events are repeated again and again, over a long period of time (as abuse within relationships typically is). This realization has led to the development of the diagnosis of complex post-traumatic stress disorder” (Vetten 1998: 5).

Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

“In order to qualify for the diagnosis of Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, it is necessary that the sufferer has endured a history of subjugation to totalitarian control over a long period of months or years. Such an experience may cause the following changes in behaviour and thinking:

- 1) Alterations in controlling how one feels, including feeling suicidal, injuring one’s self, explosive or severely inhibited anger, compulsive or inhibited sexuality
- 2) Alterations in consciousness including amnesia, dissociation, flashbacks

- 3) Alterations in self-perception, including a sense of helplessness, paralysis, self-blame, guilt, aloneness
- 4) Alterations in perceptions, especially a preoccupation with the perpetrator, can include obsessive desire for revenge, belief in the perpetrator's omniscience, idealization, gratitude, or belief in their supernatural powers.
- 5) Alterations in relations with others, including isolation or withdrawal, disruption of intimate relationships, or desire for rescue
- 6) Alterations in systems of meaning, like a loss of faith or a sense of despair" (Vetten 1998: 6).

The Stockholm Syndrome

This syndrome is named after a bank robbery in 1973 in Stockholm, Sweden. Four hostages were kept captive for six days by armed captors. Unpredictably these captives started to bond with the robbers. They even felt that their captors were protecting them from the police.

Battered women often develop very strong bonds with their abusers. The love they often have for their abusers is difficult to understand. The strong bonds these abused women develop with their abusive husbands is called the Stockholm Syndrome. This strange phenomenon is like the bonds the captives felt towards their captors. This bonding is not unusual and develops quite often in groups of hostages, prisoners of war, concentration camp prisoners, and cult members, when taken away from home. Bonding with an abuser is a way of surviving the traumatic circumstance.

There must be certain conditions to develop the Stockholm Syndrome. One person must threaten to kill someone, and this victim must believe that it is possible that it could happen. Hostages often have no way of escape, but an abused woman often finds that she cannot escape the situation either for several reasons, i.e. he threatens to kill her if she leaves, she has nowhere to go, and financially

she is dependent on him. Her lack of self-confidence does not allow her to think of the possibility of living away from her abuser in a life entirely chosen by herself. Hostages and other victims must be isolated and not know that they have support in the outside world. There are the police, who are busy organizing the return of freedom to the victims of hostage taking. The abused woman can get lots of help in the outside world to free her from the abuser.

The captor in a hostage situation displays his violent intend, but after a while, when the hostages have calmed down and have become obedient, the captor might show a little kindness. The captive then changes his or her mind and thinks that his captor is quite a nice person, and bonding starts. The same change is discovered in many women abused by their husbands or partners.

The victim in an abusive relationship knows that she cannot show any expression of anger or resentment towards her husband, because he is very likely to explode in anger. She knows her husband, and is totally aware of his moods and what they promise. She is very submissive, because that often puts him in a better mood. Sometimes he is even kind and that gives the abused woman hope that he might change his abusive behaviour. She lives for these moments of kindness, the psychological impact is great, and she develops a poor self-concept. She loves her husband for the occasional kindness he bestows on her, and this bonds her with her abuser, and often stops her from leaving her husband.

The death of the woman occurs sometimes when he is very angry with her, often over something small, and in a rage he beats her to death. This is the most extreme form of domestic violence.

Abuse in a relationship is usually under-reported, as the woman is afraid of involving the police. She fears that if she were to involve the police, he might become very angry with her and punish her for doing so. She does not always know what she is in for, so she lets her bruises heal in the privacy of her own home, without involving anyone.

The man who uses verbal abuse is motivated by his uncontrolled anger, and it is caused from a personal feeling of lack of power. He often feels that he is not appreciated in his job. He feels inferior and his inferiority complex causes him to lash out at his wife, whom he feels does not appreciate him as much as she should. He criticizes his wife when he feels frustrated; he yells at her and wants her to feel bad, so that he can feel better. He wants to rule over her. In the beginning of the relationship, he thought that she was smart, fun to be with, and pretty. This is now one of the reasons he feels inferior. She is smarter than him and he wants to destroy that. The verbal abuse he uses on her does that, and he has reached his goal when she is not the free-spirited, happy woman any more, he once married.

With most abusers, of whatever type, they are filled with inner tension and a feeling of inferiority, as well as a poor self-concept. These feelings are released when they take their anger and frustrations out on their wives.

The Cycle of Violence

The Cycle of Violence is a pattern of behaviour, which many abusive men display.

First there is the tension-building phase. Communication between the couple becomes strained, he feels frustrated, not appreciated and anxious. The wife who has gone through the Cycle of Violence before knows that nothing she does will change his behaviour. He becomes more and more irritated and agitated and his anger builds up. In his own mind he blames his partner for the state he is in. He broods and might become jealous of his wife's kind mood. His brooding intensifies, he feels frustrated on how his life is and how he is not appreciated by his wife, children, and outsiders. As his mood intensifies, he might go over at any time, into the next phase of the cycle. He becomes abusive and lashes out at his wife in anger, with whatever form of abuse is his habit, whether that

is verbal, physical, or psychological abuse. This is the phase when he allows his anger to go out of control. He has to have the power over his wife and the rest of the universe. He might be jealous of her and in his mind he feels that she must have cheated on him with other men. He ruminates and has repetitive thoughts such as “No one can have her, she cannot leave me.” His anger gets to a boiling point, he cannot be controlled, he lashes out on her and might beat her repeatedly. In this phase some men go so far as to kill their wives in total rage. He might also have started drinking heavily at the beginning of this phase and the alcohol, he thinks, gives him courage to sort out his wife, once and for all. The cycle continues and his rage could be off-set by the birth of a baby, a cat in his chair, children making a noise, or a small toy under a chair. His rage runs its full course, he might break furniture, break crockery, his rage is out of all proportion to what set it off. The phase of violence could take a couple of minutes, or days. He might beat his wife badly, and leave her badly hurt, unconscious, or dead. This man’s behaviour is out of all proportion and only when his anger has subsided will the third phase set in.

The third phase is the so-called Honeymoon Phase. The abuser is full of remorse and apologizes about what he has done. He feels sorry and tries to make amends. He promises her that it will never happen again. Broken furniture gets fixed or replaced. He gives her gifts and flowers, demonstrating how sorry he is for the abuse. The wife might have threatened to leave him; now is the time to make her stay. He apologizes and does little things for her. He discovers that his behaviour of remorse and love has the right effect on his wife. She forgives him and for a while peace reigns in the home, while he has discovered that making amends for a while keeps his wife at his side. He might even promise her that he will go for therapy and he does his best to make her and others believe that the violence will never happen again.

However, the Honeymoon Phase comes to an end and the first

phase, the tension building phase starts and the Cycle of Violence has come full circle. As the cycles develop, the Honeymoon Phase becomes shorter and shorter and may eventually disappear completely. There are some husbands who never apologize to their wives; there are those who feel that they did nothing wrong, that it was all the wife's fault.

When the abuser is angry, he expects a reaction from his wife. He does not want to be ignored by her, he is hooked on violence and wants his "fix." When he turns violent, he releases the tension that has been building up in him. Angry outbursts are a need in him. He does not know how to live differently.

The wife's desire for intimacy diminishes when he treats her badly. The abuser has something to say about that as well. He criticizes her harshly on not giving him sex the way she used to, in the beginning of their relationship. He is angry about it and might even find another woman, or a prostitute, to give him what he wants. Destruction of property is a demonstration of abusive anger.

Lara's Story

Lara told me the following story: "I have been married for eighteen years and have a son of fifteen. My husband has a girlfriend, which I am quite used to, because he has on and off been involved with other women.

"I went to Art School before I married and I used to paint, but I have hardly painted all these years I have been married, because my husband did not approve."

"In what way did he not approve?"

"He felt that I should do housework. After all, he worked eight hours a day, so why should I sit and waste my time? We were short of money, or let's rather say that I was short of housekeeping money. Therefore, five months after my son was born, I decided to start Art Classes at home. I had special easels made by the husband of a friend of mine. I loved my classes and I had so many pupils. I was

totally self-sufficient, because I never had to ask my husband for housekeeping money, which he had always doled out in very small amounts.

“I became popular in town and people used to walk up to my husband and congratulate him on the smart wife he had. Unfortunately, that was just the wrong thing to do. My husband became more and more morose.

“Then one day after classes he took all my easels outside, fetched an axe, and chopped them up.”

“How did you feel when that happened?”

“I stood very still, I didn’t know what to do, I was just dumbfounded, and I was also scared of him, in case he attacked me with the axe.”

“And then what happened?”

“He took all the pieces of wood, threw them next to the garage, and in a satisfied way said, ‘That’s that,’ and he did not say another word about it ever.”

“How did you feel when it was all over?”

“I felt shattered, I felt numb all over and shocked and so empty. All the happiness I had known disappeared and never returned. After that I had to beg for housekeeping money again.”

“Lara, there are many ways of committing domestic violence and what you went through, damaging property, depriving you of your basic needs, are two of them and the third is to frighten you by the violence he showed by using an axe. He is a very angry man and jealous as well. He was jealous of your success, which he wanted to destroy, because your success made him feel insignificant.”

We spoke about abuse and her predicament of her life the way it was now for quite a while longer.

An abusive husband creates his wife’s environment to which she adapts. She is conditioned by him. She does not create her own environment, as we saw in Lara’s story. The verbal abuse, the power games he plays with her, as he makes jokes at her expense and his

outbursts of anger, kills her spirit. But her conditioning could come from other areas as well. In some Muslim countries a woman cannot divorce her husband, and if she does, the children belong to him. In these patriarchal countries, the wife is trapped in an often bad relationship, and she cannot rely on the help of her family. When a daughter in these cultures complains about her husband to their mother, all she hears from her is that “He is such a nice man, and she must obey him.” These women have no hope that their lives will ever improve.

A woman in a patriarchal trap changes her mind slowly and tries to see her husband in a different light, and she blames herself in the same way, as badly as her husband often does. She tries to find fault in her own behaviour, and develops a low self-esteem and loses self-confidence.

Physical abuse has been in the news for quite a while, but verbal abuse has to follow. It is not very well known. The verbal abuser breaks down his wife with such sayings as “You must be crazy to believe that. You are illogical. You are only a woman. Do what I tell you to do, or I’ll divorce you and you will not get a penny from me!”

When the poor abused woman knocks on a friend’s door, she often hears, “For better or worse,” or “Nobody says that life is easy.” “Be nice to people and they will be nice to you.” These clichés are all wrong and they will not help her at all. What she needs in such a case is you, her friend, who by reading this book, as well, is well informed to help someone in need. Clichés don’t help at all and should be scrapped from our culture.

Sometimes an abused woman sees a counsellor, or a well informed friend. She feels that there is something wrong in their relationship and then asks her, “Is this normal?” telling her confidante a part of her story. The abused woman herself is most often not well informed. She first doubts her partner and feels that he is unfair, but as the verbal abuser carries on with his criticism, his wife

changes and she starts to believe him. Only by confiding in a well informed person will she realize that their relationship is wrong, that her husband is abusive and that the pain she suffers is all his fault, and that he treats her unfairly on purpose to hurt her.

When the verbally abused wife starts to recognize that his verbal outpourings are there to upset her, she finds it first hard to believe that he does so to dominate and control her. She must be told that there is nothing wrong with her, not her feelings, her actions, her thinking, or her way of doing things.

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