



The term “Domestic Violence” is actually a term used to describe a variety of violent relationships. In a broader context, violent relationships may also involve unmarried couples, dating violence, date rape and stalking. Usually however, the term domestic violence refers to adult couples involved in an intimate relationship where one partner uses intimidation and violence to maintain power and control over the other partner. The definition of abuse is not only the physical, it encompasses, psychological, economic and sexual abuse. Violence occurs in all types of relationships; between friends, same sex partners, parents and their children, against the elderly or anyone in a vulnerable position. Vulnerability may be the result of less physical strength and stature than the abuser, disability, financial constraints, immigration concerns, or the bond of children. Perpetrators of domestic violence can come from all ethnicities, classes, educational backgrounds and races and may occur against both men and women. Often there is a sense of powerlessness to do anything about the abuse.

Counseling Services has partnered with campus and community groups to host a Domestic Violence Forum: *Break the Silence, Break the Cycle*, on March 29, 2007, in Largo Student Center from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The purpose of the forum is to provide information and awareness about domestic violence, how to recognize an abusive relationship, what services are available in Prince George’s County, and where to go for help. There will be opportunities for discussion, questions and answers, as well as thought-provoking exhibits depicting the scope of the problem. Please join us as we begin to dialogue about this difficult subject.



Break  
the Silence,  
Break the  
Cycle

## *Immigration Concerns in Domestic Violence*

by Beth Adkins, Counselor, Counseling Services

Situations of Domestic Violence can be further complicated by immigration problems. An individual without legal status in the United States may be reluctant to report abuse when they fear deportation. Undocumented immigrants are some of the most vulnerable in cases of domestic violence. Obtaining legal status is sometimes tied to the spouse, such as when married to a U.S. citizen or to legal permanent residents. An abusive spouse may use the vulnerability as a means of control and domination. Spouses caught in this circumstance may feel it is better to contend with the abuse than report it.

Immigrant women tend to stay in abusive relationships longer than other abused women as a result of being in an unfamiliar country, language barriers, and not knowing where to go for help. Because of the difficulty in leaving an abusive relationship, undocumented immigrants may experience violence that escalates to a higher level because of the delay in going for help.

In 1994, Congress recognized the problem when it approved the *Violence Against Women Act*. The law included provisions that granted battered undocumented immigrants married to

U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents, the right to apply for legal residency on their own rather than depending on their husbands to petition for them. In 2000, Congress extended access to special visas to battered undocumented immigrant women, regardless of their relationship to their offender.

On the other hand, if the batterer is an undocumented immigrant, spouses are often reluctant to report them, fearing the spouse will be deported. The *Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act* allows for deportation of non-citizens for domestic violence, child abuse, child neglect and abandonment, violation of a protective order and stalking. Deportation can affect ability to receive and/or get alimony and child support. Victims with children may find that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to collect support from a spouse who has been deported to another country, making them reluctant to report abuse.

*For more information go the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Web site, [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov)*

## A Survivor's Story

by Veronica Ginyard, Victim's Advocate, House of Ruth Maryland

There's a growing problem in our county and across the nation and it's claiming the lives of mothers and aunts, and leaving children without hope for their future. It leaves a lasting impression in the minds of all who has crossed its path. I am speaking of Domestic Violence. The reported incidents are flooding our court systems, although many cases go unreported. It is believed that knowledge is power; if that's the case we have a responsibility as a society to enlighten those that are suffering in these relationships to know there's away out.

### *As experienced by my children...*

*"I remember a fight when all of my brothers and sisters were awake in the same room. I remember me waking up in the middle of the night; my mother was sitting on my bunk bed. I guess she thought that my father wouldn't hit her because she was in the room with us and we were all awake. But he did, we had a play kitchen oven and he slammed it over her head." — Kelsey*

*"I remember when my father was on top of my mother hitting her, and I was helping my mother by hitting my father in the back with a phone book." — Jourdan*

*"I remember a time were my father and I were in the living room watching a movie, where a husband was beating his wife and I remember me having an uneasy feeling knowing that my father beats my mother also. When my mother came home that afternoon she went into the kitchen where my father followed her and beat her in front all seven of my brothers and sisters." — Lauren*

I had no idea at the time that he would represent the worst time in my life. If I'd known what I know now I would have left a long time ago. We met and later married in 1986 when our first child was born. We lost that child due to difficulties during my pregnancy. I then wanted another child, so we had John. During my pregnancy with John, I experienced something that baffled me. That's when the abuse started (mentally). He would call me names and do his best to make me feel that my best wasn't good enough—ever. We had a contracting company and there were problems within the business. So naturally I thought that I was getting the worse of that and he would just apologize and I would never have to go through that experience again. That bad time turned into a bad 13 years of marriage. I was coming up pregnant every year and becoming more and more despondent towards other people, knowing that I couldn't possibly tell them about my horrifying and humiliating days and nights at home. The only time that I went out was with the kids, because if I dared go anywhere with anyone else, that would lead to an argument and later a beating of some kind, usually to the head and face area. You see—he knew that kind of injury would keep me in the house without a doubt. This was all from my husband, the man I swore before God to love and honor. I can count on one hand how many times he helped me with our

eight children. I never really spoke about my duties as a mother because my children were all that I was living for. If I didn't take care of the children by cooking, cleaning, and showing love, he wouldn't do it. My friends stop visiting; I stopped talking to my family. I didn't dare let them in on what was going on in my household.

In 1999 he hit me for the last time and the police were called. I have called the police before, but many times I wouldn't press charges, but this time it wasn't up to me—it was pretty obvious to the police that a terrible crime had been committed. I heard the policemen say "He's going out of here." He was arrested and escorted by police officers and driven to the Upper Marlboro jail. That would be, I thought, the beginning of a new life. I was wrong—he would continue to abuse and harass me even after my children and I moved away.

I received help from House of Ruth Maryland, a battered women's facility based in Baltimore, Maryland, with offices in other parts of the state. It is a nonprofit organization that helps women with shelter, clothing, legal aid, and all that one would need to get a fresh start. They also provide counseling services. I packed my eight children and whatever would fit in my Chrysler and left for the shelter. I had made the call many times before, so when I got to the shelter the intake worker remembered my name. We stayed there for about a week or so. While at the House of Ruth Maryland, I was assisted with my stay-away orders and other logistics. This helped me to continue to stay away from my abuser. I later bought a small Cape Cod 2-bedroom house in Capitol Heights, Maryland. I would work three jobs to make ends meet, but everyday I thanked God that we were out of immediate danger. He stalked me until 2005. ➤



PRINCE GEORGE'S  
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301-322-0149

*Step by Step* is published twice per year to keep you informed of program activities and issues related to mental health and well-being.

*A Survivor's Story continued*

Being a single parent is challenging enough without dealing with the mental fallout from the years of abuse of what I've been through and what my children witnessed. They are the reason why I walked away from the domestic violence.

I was, at some point, diagnosed with depression by my doctor. I told him "if I am depressed, I just don't have time to notice or deal with it right now." I am still dealing with the domestic violence fallout, the mistrust, the second guessing myself, always trying to figure out if I am making the right decision. My self-esteem is better but it is a constant work in progress.

What's so ironic about this part of my life is that my family and I received a huge blessing because of the abuse. On August 19, 2005, we received the Extreme Make-over Home Edition. We now have a beautiful 3-story home and a brand new life. My children are blessed, beautiful, talented, and smart. My first born John blessed me with a beautiful grandson. The whole point of me telling this horrible part of my life is to bring awareness and hope to those who find themselves in these situations as similar to what I am experiencing ongoing. There are places and people to help... **break the silence; break the cycle.**

## Domestic Violence Helplines

### Prince George's County Hotline

301-731-1203  
1-866 DV-Crisis

### Family Crisis Center, Inc. 301-779-2100

### National Domestic Violence Hotline

1-800-799 SAFE (7233)

or

1-800-787-3224

(TTY for the Hearing Impaired)

## *The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children*

by Saundra Lynch Ervin, Coordinator of Counseling Services

Women who are battered often go to extreme and courageous lengths to protect their children from an abusive partner. In fact, research has shown that the non-abusing parent is often the strongest protective factor in the lives of children who are exposed to domestic violence. However, growing up in an abusive and violent home may be a terrifying and traumatic experience that can affect every aspect of a child's life, growth, and development. In spite of this, we know that when properly identified and addressed, the effects of domestic violence on children can be mitigated. In homes where domestic violence occurs, children are at a high risk for suffering physical abuse themselves. Regardless if children are physically abused, the emotional effects of witnessing domestic violence are very similar to the psychological trauma of being a victim of child abuse. Each year, an estimated minimum of 3.3 million children witness domestic violence ([www.letswrap.com](http://www.letswrap.com)).

Domestic violence affects every member of the family including the children. Domestic violence creates a home environment where children live in constant fear. They are unable to establish nurturing bonds with either parent, and oftentimes have a need to protect the "family secret" from others. Children react to their environment in different ways, and reactions can vary

depending on the child's gender and age. Children exposed to domestic violence are more likely to develop social, emotional, psychological and/or behavioral problems than those who are not.

Recent research indicates that children who witness domestic violence tend to experience more anxiety, low self-esteem, depression, anger and temperament problems. The trauma they experience as a result of the abuse can surface later in the form of behavioral and social disturbances that effect their development and potentially remain with them into adulthood.

According to [actabuse.com](http://actabuse.com), domestic violence has the following effects on children:

### **Abusive or Aggressive Behavior:**

"Research has indicated that violent behavior is learned. The child tends to model the behavior of and/or identify with the parent's methods for resolving the conflict. After observing abusive behavior, the child learns that hitting, slapping, etc., are effective and acceptable ways to resolve problems. As a result, the child may grow up and adopt the learned behavior by abusing a spouse.

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### **Passive, Withdrawn Behavior:**

The child witnessing violence in the home and identifying with the victim displays passive, withdrawn behavior. Home is not a place of healthy relationships, and security, but a place of unpredictable danger. The passive child has extreme difficulty asserting his/her needs and copes with the violence by withdrawal and isolation. Girls tend to use indirect and passive forms of aggression to meet their goals and to emotionally hurt others or they tend to turn the aggression inward toward themselves. The danger in this behavior is that the child, upon reaching adulthood still assumes a victim role in interpersonal relationships; thus, the cycle continues.

### **Emotional Difficulties:**

A low or weakened self-esteem is often an effect experienced by the child who witnesses domestic abuse. A parent or teacher may observe the child as an underachiever academically and/or socially. Weakened feelings about the self may often create apathy, refusal to participate in social activities and a feeling of helplessness or hopelessness which may ultimately translate into suicidal tendencies.

### **Role Reversal:**

Frequently in a violent family environment, the child will assume the responsibility of trying to stop or prevent the violence from occurring between the parents. To accomplish this task, the child attempts to “take care of” his/her parents by assuming a caretaker role with siblings and by assuming all of a major portion of household tasks. The major damage in the role reversal is that the child usually feels guilty and inadequate; thus, the self-concept remains in its weakened state.

### **Chemical Dependency:**

The misuse of alcohol and/or drugs may be a vehicle of escape from the violence and instability in the family. This possibility increases if there is dependency on drugs and/or alcohol on the part of one or both parents.

## **Counseling Services Contact Info**

**To schedule an appointment with a counselor, call**  
301-322-0149, 301-322-0093 or 301-322-0092

**Walk-ins are welcome:** Building TZ, Rms. 123,125 & 127  
(Located behind Lanham Hall)

**Hours:** Monday–Thursday, 8:30 a.m.–6:00 p.m.  
Friday, 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m.  
Evening hours by appointment.

### **School Problems:**

There is a logical correlation between a child experiencing a violent home life and his or her behavior at school. The behaviors may include physical aggression in resolving conflicts with peers, academic underachievement, difficulties and frustration in concentrating, and truancy. The truancy can be intensified when running away from home appears to be less frightening than going home.

### **Guilt:**

As with the role reversal effect, the child does not feel worthy or adequate in the parent(s)’ eyes and may even feel responsible for the violent outbursts. Older children may feel guilty if they weren’t able to stop or prevent it from occurring.

### **Weak or Unhealthy Interpersonal Skills:**

It may be difficult for these victims to form healthy, intimate relationships as adults. They may have difficulties in communicating feelings and resolving conflicts, and have unrealistic expectations of other people. As a result of the victimization in the formative years, healthy development of trust, nurturing, autonomy, etc. may be underdeveloped.

### **Physical and/or Sexual Injury:**

The child may be directly abused either physically or sexually (or both) as a result of the parent’s abusive behaviors.

### **Distorted Problem-Solving Skill Development:**

Children develop methods of dealing with everyday problems in the formative years by observing the interaction and skills of parents or guardians. Since violence and abuse are learned behaviors, the child will most likely continue the cycle as an adult, lacking appropriate problem-solving skills, (www.actabuse.com).”

No studies or statistics can ever possibly measure the life-long impact domestic violence can have on a child’s self-esteem, capacity to trust others, and how they approach all relationships throughout their life-span, including how they someday parent their own children. Getting help for these children is important. Therapists are available who are experienced at helping children and their families affected by domestic violence. The sooner professional intervention is established, the sooner serious emotional and psychological concerns can be addressed and stopped for everyone.

### **Resources**

1. Effects of Abuse on Children  
Retrieved February 12, 2007 from  
<http://www.actabuse.com/effectschildren.html>
2. Women’s Rural Advocacy Program  
Retrieved March 2, 2007 from  
<http://www.letswrap.com/dvinfo.htm>