

# Challenging the Myths

Many myths exist about intimate partner violence in refugee families. Many of these misconceptions have the potential to place the blame for the abuse on the woman, disregard safety issues, and/or fail to hold the partner responsible for his behaviour. Here are a few of the most common ones:

## Myth: Alcohol and drugs make him violent.

Many men are abusive when they have not used any substances. And there are many men who drink or use drugs that aren't abusive towards their partner. Attributing intimate partner violence to substance use contradicts the importance of accepting personal responsibility for the abuse. It is not the underlying cause.

“A man systematically abusing a woman is not a relationship, chemical-use, or childhood abuse issue. It is battering. Referring to or treating it as anything else distracts attention from his violence and the beliefs that drive it, the experiences of the woman and children it hurts, and the long- and short-term consequences he creates for him and them. His violence comes from believing he is entitled to power and control over her (and their children).” Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs: The Duluth Model, 2013.

## Myth: Men who are abusive have mental health illnesses.

Most men who abuse their partners do not have a mental health illness. Research shows that the proportion of abusers with mental health problems is no higher than in our overall society. It is important to keep in mind that if it were a result of his illness, it would not only be directed towards his partner. It would also occur with his neighbours, coworkers, other family members or friends. Intimate partner violence happens when a person has learned and adopted this behaviour and chooses to use it against his partner.

## Myth: He wouldn't have hit her if it wasn't for the tremendous resettlement stress and adjustment issues.

While some men who are abusive towards their partners might be under stress, this is a factor but not the underlying cause of the behaviour. There are numerous men who are experiencing stress but who do not use violence. Refugee women are also experiencing stress however they are less likely to abuse their partners and rarely to the same extent.

## Myth: He just has difficulty controlling his anger sometimes.

As a RAP service provider, you might think that the man who is abusing his partner “loses his temper”. The truth is that these men are often very specific about when they engage in this behaviour. For example, they do not do it in public or to leave evidence on visible areas of the body. They might also be very charming in public making it hard for others to believe that it is possible. They don't “lose their temper” with others which is an indication that they are aware of what they are doing.

Many men also abuse their partners emotionally and psychologically, without ever using physical violence. This further demonstrates the extent of their control.

### Myth: Separation for the family is not good for their children.

Children are very much affected by living in an environment where there is abuse. Safety is important for them, and they witness the incidents and the impacts, which affects them in a variety of ways. While it is difficult to know exactly how the abuse will affect individual children without a thorough assessment, research indicates that they are at increased risk for a number of short and long-term issues.

### Myth: All men who abuse women come from violent backgrounds.

While this might be the case sometimes, it most certainly is not true in every circumstance. Many refugee men using abuse do not come from violent backgrounds and many men who do come from violent backgrounds do not go on to be abusive.

### Myth: Violence is an inherent and accepted part of certain cultures.

IPV is not particular to any community or ethnicity – it cuts across all classes, backgrounds, religions and culture. The root of the problem lies in the partner’s internal need for power and a belief that they have the right to control another person. Some refugee men who use abuse may also use religion to justify their violence against their partner.

### Myth: Intimate partner violence is a private, family matter.

Unfortunately, it is this belief which has led to centuries of silence, isolation, and the lasting existence of domestic violence. The extensive consequences (including on children) challenge the merits of this myth. There are considerable social, psychological, financial, physical, and other effects which warrant heightened attention and appropriate responses to this issue.

### Myth: Intimate partner violence includes only physical violence.

While physical violence might be the most life-threatening form of abuse, incidents can include coercive acts, psychological and/or emotional abuse, sexual abuse, financial abuse, spiritual abuse, harassment; stalking; and new media or digital abuse.

### Myth: He is still a good father despite his abusive behaviour. His relationship with his spouse does not affect the children.

While it’s a common belief that some children are not “directly” affected by the abuse that is happening in their parent’s relationship, in fact it is rare that children are not impacted by the environment and exposure to abuse. The effects are often long-standing for these children. In Canada when children who are under the age of 16 are present during incidents of abuse, it is mandatory to report that to child protection services.



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