

What causes domestic violence?

In trying to understand what causes domestic violence, researchers have both examined the characteristics that influence the behavior of offenders and considered whether some victim/survivors have a heightened vulnerability to victimization.

The British Medical Association acknowledges that while anyone can be a victim of domestic abuse, certain groups are in a more vulnerable position than others. For example, 30 per cent of domestic abuse begins during pregnancy, with pregnant women more likely to have multiple sites of injury, indicating that the fetus and the woman herself are the focus of the perpetrator's abuse. Disabled people are also at a greater risk of abuse. The odds of being a victim of violence are two-fold higher for those with a physical disability, and three-fold higher for those with a mental-illness related disability, when compared to those without disability.

One researcher has identified three underlying aspects of domestic abuse. First, individuals learn how to abuse from their family or friends, and second that they must have the opportunity to abuse. The third is that the perpetrator must choose to abuse. Choosing to use violence may reflect a belief that resorting to violence or emotional abuse is the only option when dealing with one-sided ideas about gender roles, or the need to control a partner.

A feminist analysis of domestic violence emphasizes unequal power relationships and social attitudes that support male power and authority over the family, ultimately leading to the abuse of women.

In an article entitled, "The 7 Ps of Men's Violence," Michael Kaufman, the co-founder of the White Ribbon Campaign and a distinguished public speaker, educator, writer outlines why some men use violence in their relationships. You will receive a copy of the article in your Participant Handbook when you attend the face-to-face training.

Men are not violent in their relationships because it's natural - "boys will be boys" - or acceptable just because they're physically stronger. When boys are raised with the expectation that women will look after them - they can feel entitled to have someone cook for them and look after the house. They may feel entitled to control who their spouse speaks to and how she spends her money. Some men feel entitled to have sex with their partner whenever they want. This sense of entitlement is not just an individual perspective. For centuries, our society has been structured with men as the head of the household. It is still considered by many people to be the natural order of families. At one time women were considered the property of men.

From birth, men are taught to always be strong, in control, fearless, to never back down, to learn to fight, to not ask for help, to ignore their own health and well-being, to never cry or show too many emotions, to be the breadwinner, to be successful, etc. etc. No one can live up to this. They are shamed for being weak. This creates a pressure cooker situation to constantly prove that as a 'real' man, you are in charge and in control.

This is why unemployment and a relationship breakup are risk factors for men's use of violence. They can make a man feel like a failure who is losing control. Violence might seem like the way to get or keep control.

The number one predictor of whether a man will use violence in his relationships is whether he grew up in a home where his father used violence. Of course many boys who grow up with this heroically stop their dads. But sadly, many go on to repeat these experiences, even if they don't want to.