

Course Paper:
Domestic Violence

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Power struggles happen in every aspect of life – especially in relationships. The back and forth of what roles we play and where boundaries are set continue to place stress on those in relationships. This power struggle often occurs when two people come together to make a couple. As time goes on and each person grows and understands the other, this back and forth is lessened. However there are times when one person in the relationship has too much domination over the other. This can sometimes lead to domestic violence – most often towards women. There are many factors that have changed how domestic violence is looked at and dealt with. Domestic Violence is too big of an issue to cover everything about it; but I would like to touch on why women do and don't seek help and how domestic violence shelters offer services that can help women get out of the abusive situation and on to the road of recovery.

I major proponent of over coming domestic violence has been the Women's Rights Movement. On August 26, 1920 the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified. It states that the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex. This addition to our Constitution made a radical change in women's rights. It was the first step to bringing women out of the realm of property and onto the path of equality. "The second wave of the women's movement, beginning in the 1960's and continuing to the present, renewed women's struggle for equality on many fronts" (Mandell and Schram, 2006,

pg. 260). During this time frame many new additions were given to the Women's Rights Movement; including the Equal Pay Act and legalization of birth control. Even after all of these steps forward for women, violence still happens on a daily basis. So then what is domestic violence? Wikipedia.com defines it as, "Domestic Violence: (sometimes referred to as domestic abuse or spousal abuse) occurs when a family member, partner or ex-partner attempts to physically or psychologically dominate another." Multicausality is the idea that there are too many different reasons people end up in the situations they do. This is very apparent in the domestic violence arena. Societies often under values women and helps women's already insecure nature continue and grow. "Therefore, the moment a woman becomes identified as being the intimate partner of a man, her value automatically decreases" (Bunch, 2006). Cultural ideas also help in the perpetuation of this idea. How a culture groups treats women overall and how a woman is raised helps her define her self worth. Her family also can be a factor of whether or not she chooses to stay with her abuser. It could even be her biological make up might even be a possible reason. Anyone of these could be the reason a women ends up or continues to stay in the abusive relationship, there are probably even more. However she ends up in this situation it is still domestic violence.

Domestic violence can come in many forms – such as women abusing men or even in homosexual relationships – it still most often occurs with a man abusing a woman. Violence does not find any bounds when it comes to money either.

"Although violence was found across both waves of study for all income levels, the prevalence of severe violence and violence in general was higher for women living

below the poverty level” (Hornik, Stainbrook, 2006). The National Institute of Justice Centers for Disease Control and Prevention did a survey of 16,000 people – half of which were women – in which it was estimated that about 1.9 million women are assaulted annually.

Domestic violence is both the physical and mental/emotional abuse of someone. Rape, physical assault, and stalking are the three most common types of reported abuse – although mental abuse is harder to measure. In a survey of 8,000 women eighteen percent were forced to have vaginal, oral and anal sex with someone in their lifetime (U.S. Department of Justice, 1998). The most common age range for when a woman was first raped occurred between 12-17 years of age. “Several authors have reported that women who are sexually assaulted as children and adolescents are at greater risk of being sexually assaulted as adults” (U.S. Department of Justice, 1998). Also it was reported about half of those surveyed said that they had at some point been physically assaulted. “For both women and men, the most frequently reported physical assault was slapping and hitting, followed by pushing, grabbing, shoving, and hitting with an object” (U.S. Department of Justice, 1998). Lastly, the survey asked about stalking. If stalking were only defined as the victim having to feel a high level of fear of attack then about eight percent of women felt threatened in this manner in their life. But if the definition were to be lowered to somewhat or a little frightened then the number would jump to about twelve percent. Looking at just this survey of 8,000 women these numbers are alarming.

This survey did not ask about mental/emotional abuse as it is harder to define and is less often admitted to. Ted Bunch writes, “On a conscious and an unconscious

level many men engage in disrespectful, intimidating, and controlling behaviors... Yet when forced to acknowledge abuse, well meaning men consider other men who abuse and assault to be different from them and quick to separate themselves from the abuser”(). In Mandell and Schram it talks about barriers as to why people do not seek help. External barriers battered women often face are they are unable to get transportation way from their abuser. Sometimes lack of information on how to get out of the situation or even the belief that these programs are not going to help or change what is going on or misinformation that these services will cost money. There are also the internal barriers of not recognizing or admitting that there is a problem. Women who are mentally abused often do not realize that this is technically abuse as there are not physical actions taken. But if you look at the definition of domestic violence you will notice that it says, “physically or psychologically dominate another.” Often times the aggressor use intimidation over their victim, causing fear for their safety or even the safety of a loved one. Another aspect of mentally abusive behavior is controlling, such as: with holding money, not allowing them to attend functions, or such extremes as watching the victim’s gas mileage. In a sense this type of violence is more bullying then actual physical trauma. Another reason why women are not quick to find help is that they feel “shame of not being able to solve one’s own problem” (Mandell and Schram, 2006, pg. 17). The woman feels she can change her partner; she can fix it if she were just better. But in fact things usually tend to go down hill. There can be a large fear of the “Unknown” (Mandell and Schram, 2006, pg. 18). The sense of if I leave how will I support myself, where will I go? As a

Human Services worker would be able to direct her to different programs that could help her: one of those being a domestic violence shelter.

In the late 1970s such shelters started opening across the nation. But where could she find such place and would they be able to take her? Possible services a women will need after leaving her abusive partner are ways to find out about, a court order...a support group, a job or an adequate welfare grant decent, affordable child care, and help finding an apartment (Mandell and Schram, 2006, pg. 305). One of the criteria for a woman to enter a shelter like this is that she must admit to that she has been abused; this is often very hard for a women. Once she has done this she can now be found a place to stay. The location of these homes are generally kept secret and not given out unless someone is believed to have been abused. Some shelters even offer to pick up the women and bring her there to make sure that the privacy of the building is maintained. At the shelter she is able to receive many different types of assistance. There is legal assistance to help with potential pressing charges against the abuser. She is also offered counseling and support groups to work through the rough road of recovery. Even assistance in finding work, government help and housing are often provided. Something else that is offered is safety, and understanding. Understanding not only from staff but also from the other women in the shelter. They are all there for one reason, and are in need of help. This bonding experience is one of the many key factors for a person to get better. These services are provided to each woman. Here is Whatcom County we have some shelters for women coming out of this situation. Two of these that are specifically for domestic violence are the Womencare Shelter and Lydia Place. Womencare was started “in 1979 to provide safe, confidential,

emergency shelter and support services to women and their children who are victims of domestic violence.” (Womencare, 2002) Womencare has a twenty-four hour hotline that is a crisis intervention line. It also provides access to shelter for women and children, and emergency food, some clothing and personal care items. One of the biggest things it offers is support and community education. Another community organization in Whatcom County that is not just for those of domestic abuse is Lydia Place. Started in 1989 it is open to all homeless women, they often get woman who have suffered some for of domestic abuse. They provide six month transitional housing and are about to expand to help those who are located outside of their main property. Another service provided is counseling for children staying at the house. Of the forty-two families they have placed since 1999 thirty-nine are still in permanent housing. These are only two of the options women who are abused within Whatcom County; there are other places that also are open to women.

Women who have been through the trauma of domestic violence need a lot of care. Men can play a key role in being this healing process, “the moment we as men decide to fully own our responsibility for violence against women we will be on the road to social change” (Bunch, 2006). But until that day comes it is up to the woman. After an abused woman leaves her abuser the power struggle is over. They have come out on the other side and can now work toward a brighter future. So many people believe that the Women’s Rights Movement has died down, however maybe it is just moving to a new level. It has changed from large all at once social change to day-by-day conquering. With each woman who steps and says that she is a survivor of domestic violence is a victory. And as Maryann from Lydia’s Place, the things she

looks forward to the most are the small victories. The moment when a women has taken back control of her life and is becoming the beautiful person she was always meant to be. Maybe all those small victories can change the world too, one woman at a time.

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