

Renewal

Domestic Violence Briefing

Definition

Domestic violence is defined by Women's Aid as:

The physical, emotional, sexual and financial abuse of one person by another with whom they have or have had an intimate relationship.

Domestic Violence can affect any woman irrespective of their age, class, disability, ethnicity, lifestyle, religion or sexuality.

The official Home Office cross-government definition of domestic violence and abuse as of March 2013 is:

"any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to: psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional."

Renewal uses the term Domestic Violence to cover a range of behaviours which include but is not limited to: destructive criticism and verbal abuse, disrespect, harassment, threats, sexual and physical violence, psychological blackmail, economic and psychological control, isolation and deceit.

Renewal believes that domestic violence affects both men and women. However Renewal also recognises that women are significantly more likely to be affected by issues of domestic violence than men.

Some stats....

7.1% of women and 4.4% of men reported having experienced any type of domestic violence in the last year, equivalent to an estimated 1.4 million female victims of domestic violence and 700,000 male victims.

(Office for National Statistics, Feb 2014 www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_352362.pdf)

Women's Aid statistics is that a quarter of British women suffer domestic abuse; many of them experience repeated violence. According to the charity, on average a woman has been assaulted 35 times before she is able to seek help.

A perpetrator doesn't necessarily only cause physical or sexual harm, but may also be psychologically, spiritually, emotionally or financially abusive.

A fifth of all violent crime occurs in the course of, or at the end of, a long-term relationship between two people.

In England and Wales domestic abuse results in more than 125 deaths a year.

Two women are killed by a partner or ex-partner each week and one man every second week because of domestic violence.

Why are we talking about Domestic Violence in Church?

Domestic violence can affect any person irrespective of gender, ethnicity, income level, education and professed religious belief.

As a church, Renewal acknowledges that domestic violence is likely to have an impact on a number of its congregation and that we will have both survivors and perpetrators of domestic violence who worship with us.

Renewal also recognises that victims of domestic abuse may be at increased risk of harm in their place of worship if they leave an abusive partner, as it may be one of the only places where they can easily be located.

Unfortunately, the Church can also be a place where domestic abuse is facilitated, colluded with or misunderstood...for example....

Teaching on submission within marriage (Ephesians 5:22) can be unhelpfully applied as meaning that a woman must obey her partner in all circumstances.

Teaching that emphasizes forgiveness but that fails to address abuse can lead a victim to suffer in silence, forgiving their abuser and blaming themselves, with the thinking: 'if I keep on praying or forgiving, they will eventually change.'

Genesis 2:18:

'The lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."'

Genesis 3:16:

'To the woman he [God] said, "I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labour you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."'

Renewal holds as absolute truth that there is no biblical justification for the acceptance of domestic violence. Whilst forgiveness is a biblical principle, it in no way equates to the acceptance of abusive behaviour and no person will be encouraged by Renewal to stay in an abusive relationship.

How can we as a Church tackle Domestic Violence?

The Church needs to take a proactive, preventative approach against domestic violence. And it isn't a women's issue, it's a Church issue. If we want to tackle it, we need to tackle it with the men. Get men to say that this is wrong. A man who abuses his wife cannot please God with his behaviour.

A pastoral response to abuse should mean listening carefully and never assuming the best of someone, even though they might be a committed church member.

Should a woman (or man) disclose to a pastor (or to someone else in the church) that they are being abused, we need to listen to them and believe them, and to refuse to excuse their abuser's actions in any way.

Relationship counselling is an unsuitable pastoral approach.

If we treat domestic abuse as a relationship issue, we collude with it.

Domestic violence is an issue of an abusive person; it's about power and control and you can't solve that by attempting to fix a relationship.

Church leaders should also be aware of the indicators of possible abuse-although it's really difficult....for example....

- When a couple starts a new relationship, take note if they progress the relationship very quickly.
- Look out for unexplained injuries or a partner who is controlling and speaks over their partner.
- Subtle indicators include a woman not being allowed out of her home, denied money or increasingly isolating herself.
- The abuser might claim the survivor is abusing them
- A common claim a perpetrator will make about the victim is that they "have a mental health problem" or is a bad parent

Tackling domestic violence, dealing with perpetrators, especially when they are known members of our Church communities, is never going to be comfortable.

But we need to hold perpetrators of abuse accountable for their actions.

Sources of Help

- 999 if risk of immediate danger to self or others
- Children's Social Care – being witness to domestic abuse is an abuse

Women

- Birmingham & Solihull Women's Aid Helpline : 0808 8000 028
- National Domestic Violence Freephone Helpline : 0800 2000 247

Men

- Men's Advice Line : 0808 801 0327
- Mankind: 01823 334 244

Perpetrators

- Respect : 0808 802 4040