**Domestic Violence Outreach**

**ARTICLE 4**

**Who Is at Greatest Risk?** 1

Any person, anywhere, can be a victim of abuse. Domestic violence affects both women and men, and cuts across all age, racial, ethnic, religious, educational, and socioeconomic strata. Available research, however, indicates that domestic violence does appear to be more prevalent in certain groups:

• women, including those who are single, separated, married or divorced;

• teens and young adults;

• women who lack access to their own financial resources;

• women who abuse alcohol or other drugs, or whose partners do;

• women who are pregnant and have been previously abused; and

• individuals whose partners are excessively jealous or possessive.

**Characteristics of Abusers**

There is no universal profile of an abuser. Perpetrators of domestic violence can be young or old, male or female, professional or unskilled, educated or illiterate, rich or poor, religious or secular, or of any race or ethnicity. Abusers run the gamut of psychological “diagnoses,” ranging from perfectly normal to psychotic. However, abusers tend to:

• objectify their partners (i.e., treat them as a category or object, not as a full human being);

• feel entitled to get their needs met without regard to the needs or feelings of their partners;

• use power (be it physical, emotional, political, economic or spiritual) to make sure their agenda is accomplished;

• feel that coercion is an effective and acceptable way to get their needs met;

• have the opportunity to be abusive without being held fully accountable; and

• behave abusively with a particular victim.

Consciously or unconsciously, most batterers assume a sense of privilege, which is used to gain and maintain power, or the “upper hand” in the relationship. They tend to believe their behavior is completely justified and necessary to fulfill their role in the relationship, as the one who is in charge, in control, is the provider and is “king of the castle.” They feel they have attained or have been endowed with privilege to behave the way they do, and do not believe what they are doing is wrong in any way. They believe the role of their partner is to do what she is told, and to further and support the batterer’s agenda and needs. Examples of privilege used as justification by batterers include: being male; being physically stronger; being heterosexual, or alternatively being a more experienced gay or lesbian; being white; being a U.S. citizen or being documented (if an immigrant); being the wage earner, or earning more money if both are employed; being more highly educated; being able-bodied; and being more religious or observant, among others.

In addition, the following characteristics are often seen in abusers:

• Often, abusers will not clearly acknowledge that their behavior is abusive or even hurtful, even if they have been arrested and convicted of a violent crime. For example, an abuser may tend to focus on what “she said” that “made him” act in a way that he considers to be justified and not at all wrong. It often takes years for abusers to move through a process of healing within themselves.

• Following a discrete abusive incident, some perpetrators may be truly sorry for their actions. Some batterers are horrified that they have hit their wives or girlfriends, are overcome with remorse, and genuinely want to change. They may apologize profusely and shower their partners with gifts and extra attention. Unfortunately, without professional help from a certified batterer intervention program, the cycle of violence usually begins anew, often with more dangerous consequences in future assaults.

• Abuse is likely to continue and to progressively escalate if abusers do not address their violent behavior. Voluntary or court-appointed professional help is almost always necessary for a perpetrator to change his behavior. Certified batterer intervention programs take between one and two years to complete.

• Some abusers blame their violent acts on external factors such as their partner’s behavior or provocation, being drunk, coping with a medical or psychological illness, or simply having a bad day. Experts in batterer intervention are quick

to remind clients that they themselves must take responsibility for their own behavior. There is no excuse for domestic violence.

1Elaine J. Alpert, et al. *Responding to Domestic Violence: An Interfaith Guide to Prevention and Intervention*, The Chicago Metropolitan Battered Women’s Network, 2005