PATTERNS OF ABUSE: GAINING POWER AND CONTROL

Objectives
By the end of this activity, participants should be able to:

- Describe how men use physical, psychological, emotional and sexual abuse on women
- Identify the motivation of abusers as gaining power and control

Materials
- Trainer Support Notes: Patterns of abuse: gaining power and control. See pages 55 to 58

Equipment
- 8 sheets of prepared flipchart paper, headed:
  - Isolation
  - Disability/Exhaustion
  - Degradation
  - Threats
  - Displays of total power
  - Enforcing trivial demands
  - Occasional indulgences
  - Distorted perspectives

Suggested timing
- 45 to 60 minutes
activity 4
method

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Method

1. Introduce the activity by explaining that the group will be invited to draw a profile of a woman experiencing domestic abuse by looking at different aspects of her life, using their existing knowledge and understanding of the issues.

2. Go through the prepared flipcharts, one at a time, asking participants to give examples under each heading of the different forms of abuse they are aware of, that women experience. Invite the group(s) to consider additional ways men might abuse women from marginalised groups. Encourage participants to be specific when describing the abuse. Record what they say on the flipchart sheets.

   Alternatively, you can divide the whole group into four smaller groups and give each group two of the headed flipchart sheets to work on. If using this approach, it may be useful to go round each group and give them prompts, if necessary. You can use the Trainer Support Notes, Patterns of abuse to help you.

3. Once completed, leave all sheets on display and allow a few minutes for participants to review what’s been written. If done in small groups, ask each group to give feedback on one heading each, until all eight have been covered.

4. Explain that although the headings are real and specific to women experiencing domestic abuse, the headings actually come from a book: ‘Rape in Marriage’ by Diana Russell. She adopted them from the list of categories which was drawn up to describe techniques used to torture and brainwash prisoners of war. Amnesty International use the same criteria to define torture. These prisoners on release often (and should) receive a lot of support, as well as facilities to counteract their appalling treatment. Women experiencing domestic abuse, on the other hand, are often blamed for staying and made to feel responsible.

continues overleaf...
5. Allow time for discussion and comments that participants want to make as a result of the activity. Possible discussion points:

- The systematic and planned nature of domestic abuse, often involving methodical and repeated actions, as opposed to individual isolated incidents
- How children can be involved in the abuse by the perpetrator
- The huge amount of strength and will power women need to free themselves
- The effect of this experience on self-esteem, confidence and ability to make judgements
- How the experience might impinge on a woman's ability to make crucial decisions
- The impact on a woman's ability to communicate clearly with agencies and officialdom e.g. Housing, Solicitors, Courts, Police, Social Workers, GPs etc
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Trainer support notes

Isolation

How might an abusive man isolate a woman?
• Keeping her housebound through injury
• Taking away the phone
• Preventing her from seeing family and friends
• Not allowing her to work, go to college, learn English
• Denying access to transport
• Restricting her money supply

Disability/Exhaustion

In what ways might a woman experiencing abuse be disabled and/or exhausted by the abuse?
• Physical injuries
• Living in constant fear
• Not allowed to sleep, woken up to have sex, make a meal or amuse friends
• Abuse often worsens during pregnancy

Degradation

How might he degrade her, or put her down, before others or herself?
• Urinating on her
• Constant insults, verbal abuse, putting down, undermining
• Making her beg for food, money, clothing, or physical care
• Making children insult and abuse her

continues overleaf...
Threats

What threats might he use? They can be directed to her/people important to her/her possessions.

- Take the children
- Find her wherever she goes - murder her/ the children
- Tell the authorities
- Tell immigration - get her deported
- He’ll commit suicide if she leaves
- Put her in a home
- To ‘out’ her as a lesbian

Displays Of Total Power

How might he appear to be all-powerful?
How does he show this?

- Keeping her pregnant
- Withholding necessary care and support
- Withholding medication or overmedicating
- Physically assaulting her
- Rape and other forms of sexual abuse
- Denying her access to contraceptives
- Locking her out of the house naked
- Finding her when she leaves

Enforcing Trivial Demands

What kinds of things might he insist on, that could seem trivial or unimportant?

- Meals have to be ready and on the table when he comes home (whatever time that happens to be)
- Clothing has to be folded a particular way
- Everything has to be done how and when he says
- Her hair has to be kept long
Occasional Indulgences

What might he do that makes him appear kind and loving after all?
- Stops the abuse for a time
- Pleads for forgiveness
- Takes her out, buys her nice things
- Organises nice surprises
- Does household chores
- Talks about getting help
- Looks after the children

Distorted Perspectives

How might he distort things to explain or justify his behaviour?
Say things like...
- It's because I love you so much
- I can't bear the thought of you with someone else
- You force me to act this way
- I have to teach you a lesson
- If only you weren't so difficult
- All marriages/relationships are like this

Using children to control women

Abusive men use children to control and undermine women in a huge variety of ways, including threatening to:
- Destroy pets and belongings
- Abuse them if the woman doesn't do what he wants
- Take the children away
- Turn them against her
- Report the woman as an 'unfit mother'
- Sexually abuse her children

continues overleaf...
Making/forcing children to

- Undertake household tasks
- Keep silent
- Witness attacks on their mother
- Take alcohol or drugs
- Split at/hit the woman
- Take part in the abuse of their mother
- Rewarding children for verbal or physical abuse of mother or each other

Punishing/abusing/controlling the woman by

- Threatening to harm the children or actually harming them
- Telling her repeatedly that she is a bad/unfit mother
- Undermining her in front of the children
- Using contact to threaten her/find out where she's living
- Making the child (children) go everywhere with him - never leaving them alone with her