

Domestic Violence Law Reform Campaign: 12 Domestic Violence Myths

#ThinkTwice

1. Domestic violence is only physical.

#ThinkTwice: Psychological violence and coercive control is often a predominant feature in domestic violence. Domestic violence *is* about power and control and oftentimes physical and sexual violence occurs when the other controlling tactics are not working.

2. Domestic violence is not such a big problem.

#ThinkTwice: Two women per week are killed by current or ex-partners. In 2012/13, 1.2 million women were estimated to have experienced domestic violence in England and Wales and 30% to have experienced it during their life time.

3. Domestic violence stops once the relationship ends.

#ThinkTwice: Coercive and controlling behaviour does not always end on separation. In fact, separation is a high risk time as the behaviour is likely to escalate, often resulting in stalking and in some cases homicide.

4. Domestic violence doesn't affect children.

#ThinkTwice: Yes, it does. At least 750,000 children witness domestic violence. In half of all domestic violence cases children are being directly abused themselves. Domestic violence is a significant risk factor for direct harm to children. There is clear evidence of grave physical harm and psychological damage of domestic abuse on children and a link with patterns of abusive behaviours amongst children themselves as a consequence.

5. Domestic violence is always reported to the police.

#ThinkTwice: Statistics show that many women do not report to the police until there have been between 30 and 40 incidents. This is for many reasons including fear of repercussions and not wanting to make matters worse, not wanting to get the abuser into trouble, fear of not being believed or taken seriously, fear for their safety and/or safety of loved ones, cultural stigma, knowing that the behaviours are subversive but believing that the police are unable to do anything about it.

6. It is not always domestic violence; it can be a one off incident.

#ThinkTwice: Domestic violence is a complex cycle: it is rarely a one-off incident. A perpetrator is always in control, knowing what they are doing and the affect that it is having on their victim. It is about power and control and many abusers do it because they *can*.

7. The perpetrator was only violent because of alcohol/drugs/stress.

#ThinkTwice: Violence is a choice. Perpetrators frequently make excuses for their violence, claiming loss of control due to alcohol, drug use or extreme stress.

8. The victim would leave if it were that bad.

#ThinkTwice: Many victims make repeated attempts to leave but are prevented from doing so by increased controlling and coercive tactics by the abuser, including stalking and violence. Other factors including fear, lack of knowledge and access to help, economic dependence, emotional dependence, cultural reasons, lack of confidence and the children may prevent them from leaving and keep them in situ. Some victims know that if they were to leave, the abuse would escalate and put them more at risk and that the abuser would track them down no matter how long it took. Ironically some stay because it would be too dangerous to leave.

9. Domestic violence only happens to poor families.

#ThinkTwice: Domestic violence affects anyone regardless of income, gender, disability, religion or culture.

10. Some women like violent relationships.

#ThinkTwice: No one likes being abused, no one should tolerate it and no-one deserves it.

11. I'm not in an abusive relationship, it doesn't affect me.

#ThinkTwice: Domestic violence currently costs the government nearly £16 billion every year. Early identification, intervention and prevention would reduce domestic violence by 79-86%, saving lives and money.

12. Domestic violence is a crime.

#ThinkTwice: No it's not. The laws used to prosecute domestic violence – including assault, burglary, property, breach of a restraining order, rape, kidnapping and murder – do not describe its essence. Patterns of power and control are missed. It misses the fact that domestic violence is about fear, coercive control and continuing acts. The totality of the behaviour and the non-physical manifestations of power and control that define an abusive relationship do real harm to victims, which are currently not recognised in criminal law. A more comprehensive criminal law is needed to close the gap between the current response and the long term oppression and suffering of victimised women and children.