

## **DOMESTIC ABUSE**

**By Maureen Bowen, Psychologist**

When we think of domestic violence we tend to envision a poor uneducated woman being pummelled by a big burly, loud aggressive man, who is also poor. But this is in no way an adequate reflection of reality.

The victims and perpetrators of domestic violence are as diverse as the population itself. The acts that constitute domestic violence also go beyond the physical violence we usually see which ranges from a slap to murder. It often begins with what the “victim” may consider to be trivial and a one-off event and escalates into more frequent and serious attacks. Abuse can also be sexual, which is also very common. Here the woman (usually) is forced to have sexual intercourse or other unwanted sexual activity by the abuser.

More insidious and potentially more harmful are psychological and emotional abuse. Psychological abuse occurs where one person is subjected to constant verbal attacks, harassment, excessive possessiveness, isolation from friends and family, deprivation of physical and economic resources, and destruction of personal property. Closely related to this is the emotional abuse, where the “victim” is constantly, insulted, threatened, unjustly accused of wrongdoing. The abuser also uses techniques to control where “the victim” goes and what he or she does.

The abuser is usually a man and the “victim” a woman however a woman can also be the abuser, although the actual instances of this are rare. Avoiding a situation of domestic violence is the best way to deal with it. Unfortunately, the passion of love sometimes blurs the warning signs of a partner’s abusive tendencies. Here are some red flags to make you think twice about your beloved:

- Objectifies women, does not see women as people, does not respect women as a group. Overall, he sees women as property or sexual objects.
- Has low self- esteem and feels powerless and ineffective in the world even if he may appear to be successful.
- Externalises the cause of his behaviour, a “bad day”, alcohol or other factors. His behaviour is always something or someone else’s fault.
- May be pleasant and charming between periods of violence and is often seen as “nice guy” to outsiders.
- Extreme jealousy
- Possessiveness
- A bad temper unpredictability
- Cruelty to animals
- Verbal abusiveness

It is said that love is blind, but don’t let it be deadly too.