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Fact Sheet 1: What is Family Violence?

FAMILY VIOLENCE IS EVERYONE'S BUSINESS AND EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY

Family violence (including domestic and intimate relationship violence) is when an individual uses any threatening, coercive, dominating, controlling or abusive behaviour[1] towards a family member including a spouse, child, parent or other relative to try and intimidate and control them.

Family violence is not an argument once in a while, it is a continuous pattern of abusive behaviour perpetrated by one person towards another, often using multiple tactics [2], which are unhealthy and harmful.

It may include:

Physical (assault) or sexual abuse/sexually abusive behaviour:

- hitting
- choking
- slapping
- kicking
- Stabbing
- Forcing someone or pressuring someone to perform unwanted sexual acts or to have sex, inappropriate touching, kissing, incest, forcing someone to watch pornography

Coercive control:

- abusive behavior that is difficult to identify, but used to control manipulate and dominate the victim/survivor,
- make you feel guilty when you see family or friends,
- tell you that you are useless,
- worthless or not good enough,
- try to convince you that you'd be lost without them,
- make you doubt your own memory, or interaction you have had with someone,
- make you feel stupid and that you won't be believed, or tell you that no one will help you if you try to get help

Spiritual abuse:

- preventing individual from engaging in or attending worship

Social abuse:

- Isolating victim/survivor, by not allowing someone to see their friends and family,
- checking calls, movements, and social media
- disconnecting the phone
- relocating from place to place to increase isolation
- continuously putting the person's friends and family down
- stop you from connecting with your community or culture

Controlling or dominating:

- check up to see what you're doing and where you're going, or ask you to constantly 'check in',
- not trust you and want to access your personal texts, emails or other messages,
- cause you to feel afraid for your own or someone else's safety

Emotional or psychological abuse:

- making someone feel worthless and inadequate
- threatening to kill or harm themselves or the person
- doing and saying things that make the other person feeling they are 'going crazy'
- gaslighting an individual
- criticise or control decisions you make
- no matter how small
- put you down and make you feel worthless

Economic/Financial abuse:

- controlling the other person financially, for example, controlling all the money (bank accounts, bills, household expenses)
- not giving someone access to any money, or giving minimal funds and expecting the household to be run efficiently
- making big financial decisions without discussing it with the family member
- stopping someone from working
- not allowing someone to have access to their wages if they work,
- manage or control your money, e.g. by giving you a spending allowance,
- stop you from working
- sell your property without your consent
- take out loans or access credit in your name
- make it hard for you to live independently by taking away money or other things you need to do this
- get fines or penalties in your name

Verbal abuse:

- put-downs
- threats
- repeated derogatory taunts
- make you afraid to say 'no'

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It is important to note that the types of abusive behaviour listed above, a child/young person, can hear, witness or be exposed to making them a victim survivor in their own right.

Examples of abusive/violent behaviour can include:

- Technology-facilitated stalking—using technology such as the internet or mobile phone to harass, stalking with the intention of causing physical or mental harm to the other person.
- Causing a person to live in constant fear—constantly threatening or coercing a person to do something they do not want to do, or having another friend or family member stalk, threaten or contact the person.
- Threatening harm to others, such as family members and, quite commonly, pets. Threats and actions of animal abuse can often prevent a woman from seeking safety by leaving [3]. make you feel afraid, threaten to tell others about your visa or immigration status, say they will hurt your family, friends or pets, or harm themselves if you choose to leave or do something they don't like, threaten to tell others about your sex, gender identity, sexual orientation or personal health information.

FAMILY VIOLENCE MYTHS

Myth: "Some people are responsible for the violence they experience – they provoke it."
The only person responsible for abuse is the person choosing to use violent and abusive behaviour.

Myth: "Domestic violence is caused by anger and rage – they just 'lost it'."
Everyone feels anger at some point, but not everyone chooses to use violence. Family Violence is a choice not a reaction.

Myth: "If it's that bad, why don't they just leave?"
The risk of harm to the victim and their children, can be much higher after they leave an abusive relationship. When the perpetrator senses they are losing control over their victim, they may increase or intensify their violence. Lack of economic stability can be a deciding factor in a victim survivor not leaving the perpetrator.

All individuals are subject to family violence, see Fact sheet: who experience FV for more information.

References:

- [1] Victorian Government: What is family violence_ <https://www.vic.gov.au/what-family-violence>
[2] SafeSteps: Defining Family Violence_ <https://www.safesteps.org.au/understanding-family-violence/what-is-family-violence/>
[3] (Victorian Government, March 2016).

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