

RESOURCE 3.1. – MATERIAL

Myths and facts about gender-based violence

Myth no. 1 “They're just arguing with each other.”

Fact no. 1: There is a significant difference between a fight and violence: a fight is an argument between people of roughly equal strength. The male dominance anchored in society and supported by culture and tradition gives men a general power advantage. If there is an unequal balance of power in society, which is also reinforced individually through physical superiority or the possession of weapons or the disposal of shared money, then there is a risk that the stronger person will take advantage of this circumstance in order to assert his or her interests. This is an act of violence in which the weaker party automatically loses.

Myth no. 2 “Violence only occurs in problem families.”

Fact no. 2: Violence is a problem that does not depend on age, nationality or religion. Social class does not play a role either, but in some social groups the phenomenon of violence is more hidden than in others. This gives the impression that only so-called “problem families” are affected. In Germany, for example, two-thirds of perpetrators of intimate partner violence have medium to high incomes and educational qualifications.

Myth no. 3 “Violence in the family is a private matter.”

Fact no. 3: All acts of violence are punishable under our laws, regardless of whether they are committed inside or outside the family. Freedom from violence is a universal human right and is enshrined in Article 3: Right to life and liberty. Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Myth no. 4 “Women* invent abuse to gain an advantage in divorce proceedings.”

Fact no. 4: On the contrary, the number of unreported cases of violence in the family is very high due to the high inhibition threshold of those affected to seek help. Women often conceal or trivialize the violence they have experienced, and many crimes are not even reported out of fear and shame.

AUTHOR: Gewaltschutzzentrum Wien (2024), Häufige Mythen, in: <https://www.gewaltschutzzentrum.at/wien/slots/mythen-faq-wien/>

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Myth no. 5 “Women who are abused must want it, otherwise they would leave.”

Fact no. 5: Women who experience violence try many things to change the situation. Only when all attempts fail do they seek outside help. Some women are controlled, threatened and isolated by their husbands and are afraid to confide in anyone. Many of those affected have neither acquaintances nor relatives to whom they can turn. Or the relatives and acquaintances do not believe her and blame her. Many women have no money and don't know who could take them in. For many of the women affected, this means that they are very afraid of the consequences of a separation. Partner violence often leads to a spiral of violence; after an acute violent situation, there can be a so-called “honeymoon phase” where the perpetrator apologizes, for example. Manipulative behaviour can be a perpetrator strategy to keep the woman in the violent relationship.

Myth no. 6 “Women ‘provoke’ violence.”

Fact no. 6: There is no excuse or justification for violence. No one deserves violence. Such an attitude blames the victims and diverts attention from the responsibility of the perpetrators. Perpetrators often claim to have been “provoked” by behaviour that they take for granted, e.g. when the wife has her own and different opinion. This “misbehaviour” is then also used as an excuse for an act of violence. Women who try to be “perfect” are also mistreated!

Myth no. 7 “Women look for men who abuse them.”

Fact no. 7: No woman wants to be beaten, raped or even murdered. Abusers do not usually resort to violence at the beginning of a relationship. In most cases, the assaults only begin after a certain period of cohabitation. Hidden forms of violence are often linked to traditional values, and the beginning of the exercise of power, control and oppression is difficult to detect. The “chivalrous protector” transforms unnoticed into a controlling husband, raging infatuation into raging jealousy. Then the affirmation “I'm crazy about you” slowly turns into “I have a right to you”.

Myth no. 8 “Men abuse women because they themselves experienced violence in their childhood.”

Fact no. 8: Experiencing violence yourself actually carries a certain risk of becoming violent yourself. This does not mean that the “cycle of violence” has to continue. Negative experiences can also lead to a particularly negative attitude towards violence, which is also the case for many men and women. Childhood experiences can sometimes explain certain behaviour, but never justify it.

Myth no. 9 “Alcohol problems are the cause of men's violence.”

Fact no. 9: Alcohol is not a cause of violence, but a trigger. Men who abuse their wife and child(ren) do so when they are drunk, but also when they are not. Alcohol has a disinhibiting effect and aggressive impulses sometimes become stronger. Statistics show that the majority of perpetrators were not drunk. Alcohol is often used by men who commit violence as a justification for not having to take responsibility.

Myth no. 10 “Men abuse because they can't express their feelings any other way.”

Fact no. 10: Acts of violence in the private sphere are often seen as an expression of intense excitement - men sometimes “explode” and supposedly have no other way of dealing with their feelings. This overlooks the fact that men who use violence do not do so indiscriminately. For example, they don't hit their boss when they are angry, but they do hit their wife. Violence is used deliberately to assert one's own interests where the belief in male supremacy remains unbroken - namely in a relationship with a woman.

Myth no. 11 “Violence only occurs in families with a migration background.”

Fact no. 11: Every third woman in **Austria** is affected by physical and/or sexual violence. And 67.7% of perpetrators are Austrian. In 84.3% of cases, the perpetrators were fathers, husbands, sons, (ex-)partners, family members and acquaintances (Gewaltschutzzentrum Wien 2023, Statistik Austria 2023, Haller 2022). It is not the origin that is dangerous, it is the relationship. **Adjust the statistics to your country!**

Myth no. 12 “Men are at least as likely to be victims of domestic violence by women.”

Fact no 12: Studies proving this usually only measure individual situations and not the severity, degree of injury, frequency or whether self-defence was involved. They are therefore misleading. It is true that women are not generally peaceful and that men generally suffer more physical violence than women. However, the perpetrators are mostly other men (e.g. 80% in Germany according to police statistics) and the scene of the crime is usually not the home. If you want to support men affected by violence, it makes sense to start here and change traditional masculinity.

Do you know any other myths?

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