

THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

The Battered Woman Syndrome

Phase 1: Tension Building

AGGRESSOR

- Anger in low stage Verbal harassment of woman; degrades her minor battering & humiliating incidents which become increasingly frequent Awareness (confining behavior to home) Growing fear that the victim will leave
- Increase in possessiveness, jealousy Increase in surveillance of victim's activities
- Increase in aggressiveness as frustration builds Increase in stress, anxiety, anger

VICTIM

- Nurturing, compliant, accepting Does everything she can to "keep peace" Denial of anger Justification of aggressor's behavior
- Blame on outside stress Assumption of responsibility to manage aggressor's behavior, covering up Alienation of helpful others, withdrawal
- Increase in stress, anxiety, anger, terror

Phase 2: Acute Battering

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AGGRESSOR

- Characterized by lack of predictability, lack of control, and major destructiveness
- Violent discharge of tension, i.e., RAGE
- "Teach her a lesson" Justification: blaming on victim
- Impaired awareness
- Emotional exhaustion
- Control of ending of phase Decrease in self-esteem

VICTIM

- Passive acceptance
- Learned helplessness, belief that it's futile to try to escape or resist)
- Distancing, dissociation, disbelief
- Minimizing of injuries
- Emotional collapse- 24-48 hours later
- Listlessness, depression Isolation
- Delayed seeking of help
- Decrease in self-esteem

Phase 3: Calm Lull, Loving

AGGRESSOR

Loving, contrite, kind

- Asks forgiveness Promises "never again" Dependency on victim's acceptance and validation of self
- Ambivalence about self
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VICTIM

- Complete victimization
- Guilt about leaving
- Responsibility for the aggressor Belief in aggressor, hope he/she will change Feels needed, validated, elevated
- Ambivalence about self
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The cycle then begins again and a symbiotic bonding is completed. Both the aggressor and victim feel total dependence on each other

Supported in part by

24-hour hotline: 417-864-SAFE(7233) / 819 N. Boonville, Springfield, MO 65802 / www.thevictimcenter.org

