

# Diary of a Psycho Therapist

## DOMESTIC ABUSE & MIND MYTHS

**Did you know each year, nearly 2 million people in the UK suffer some form of domestic abuse?**

### #NoMoreWeek

1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men will suffer domestic abuse at some time in their lives. For every three victims of domestic abuse, two will be female and one male (Mankind, 2016). Domestic abuse can occur in same-sex relationships, between intimate partners but also family members.



The UK government's definition of domestic abuse is "any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to psychological, physical, sexual, financial, emotional."

Examples of abuse can include:

- Taking control over someone's everyday life, e.g., where they go, what they wear
- Monitoring or controlling someone's emails, text messages or social media accounts
- Threats to kill or harm
- Harassment and stalking
- Online or digital abuse
- Financial or economic abuse
- Psychological and/or emotional abuse

In January 2019, the government introduced the Domestic Abuse Bill 2017-19 following a consultation on transforming the response to domestic abuse. The legislation was reintroduced in March 2020 as the Domestic Abuse Bill 2019-21. This has not passed into the law as yet. The Serious Crime Bill, including Clause 76 regarding the offence of "Controlling or coercive behaviour in an intimate or family relationship" achieved Royal Assent on 3 March 2015.

It is thought that domestic abuse happens to a certain type of person- based on socio economic status, religious or cultural backgrounds, or a perception of strength and resilience. This is not the case. Remember domestic abuse can happen against anyone and anybody can be an abuser.

## **Mind Myths | I think I am going mad.**

Survivors can think it's 'just in their head' and the perpetrator will often reinforce this through a pattern of controlling and coercive behaviour. They will 'gaslight' the survivor. This means manipulating them by psychological means into doubting their own sanity. It comes from a 1930s play Gaslight. A husband successfully drives his wife mad by constantly changing the lighting in their house and denying that there was any change. Over time, the wife becomes so doubtful of her own perceptions that she comes to rely on her husband for everything.

*“ Gaslighting is a slow unconscious loss of reality ”*  
- Tracey Malone

Going forwards, set clear goals that matter, and work towards them daily. Whether it's painting that wall you've been putting off for some time now or creating that dynamic presentation at work. Remember, with dedication we can do anything. This sense of purpose provides direction and creates a fresh layer of self-will. We can follow this roadmap towards a more accomplished and fruitful life. Each time we fail, we can realign, reset and be even more dedicated, because failure, at times, leads to excellence. In the wise words of Driessen, "do all things (this week) with love, passion and dedication!"

## **Mind Myths | It's my fault, right?**

Survivors often believe they deserve the abuse or have in some way provoked this. They will believe if they can get things right, routine, meals, chores etc they won't trigger the abuse. They hope that this will appease the perpetrator and diffuse the intensity or frequency of the abuse. This sometimes works as short-term respite, but the cycle of abuse will always continue, gradually eroding the survivor's self-esteem and identity. Survivors will say, 'I tried to be good, I tried to be better. It was never enough. I am too attached or in love.' Often a perpetrator will tell a victim that they caused them to do it. A victim is never responsible if a perpetrator chooses to behave in an abusive and controlling way.

*“ No amount of me trying to explain myself was doing any good. I didn't even know what was going on inside of me, so how could I have explained it to them? ”*  
- Sierra D. Waters

## Mind Myths | I have no one else.

Survivors have often invested everything into the relationship. They may be fiercely loyal or protective and often be deeply in love with the perpetrator. They may have invested intimately, socially, emotionally and even financially. Their commitment and need to please the perpetrator create an attachment. Often the survivor has slowly become isolated. Their world has shrunk, reducing their support and social networks, distance from family and friends, as they become dependent on the perpetrator and more isolated. The survivor may become attached to the perpetrator, creating Trauma Bonding that can defy logic and is hard to break.

*Stockholm syndrome is a condition in which hostages develop a psychological bond with their captors during captivity. Emotional bonds may be formed between captors and captives, during intimate time together, but these are generally considered irrational in light of the danger or risk endured by the victims*

## Mind Myths | Why don't I just leave?

Survivors cite a number of reasons they don't leave including, staying for the sake of the children, thinking the perpetrator would change and the abuse would stop, feeling too much in love or a fear of the unknown. Survivors may also be afraid of threats and consequences and not know where to go or who to go to. Often there will be a pattern of 35 to 40 separate incidents before someone even reaches out for help. Survivors leave on average 9 times before they leave for good.

*Many victims don't know they are experiencing abuse until they are in incredibly dangerous situations. By the time victims realise and can acknowledge the danger they're in, many believe no system will ever be powerful enough to keep them safe. So, they stay, even after they want to leave, and know it's dangerous. They stay because it may be even more dangerous to leave. If they do report to professionals, they are making a terrifying gamble.*

Jess Hill, Author: 'See What You Made Me Do'

## Mind Myths | Who will even help me?

Survivors often do not know of the services and resources available to them. They may not feel they will be safe from the perpetrator because they will always be found. They may choose to stay out of a false sense of safety and distorted perspective. The fear of the unknown is often more daunting than living with the abuse.

“From what I've been told, the scariest part of being part of a domestic abuse relationship is the idea that you cannot escape, and you cannot get help, that feeling of being stuck.”  
-Kerry Washington

## **Mind Myths | They have never hit me so it's not that bad ...is it?**

Extreme psychological and emotional abuse is recognised as a criminal offence under the new coercive and controlling behaviour law passed in 2015. There has been a perception that physical abuse must be worse than psychological or emotional abuse. It is unfair to place a judgment on this. Abuse experienced by the survivor cannot be measured and should not be measured at all. Attitudes are slowly changing and there is more recognition of the long-term impact of psychological abuse. Scars heal and bones may fuse back together eventually if the survivor lives. Some injuries may never completely heal and likewise the long-term effect of psychological abuse is debilitating. Any type of abuse can result in loss of life and no type of abuse is any less excruciating than another. Abuse shouldn't be compared as this can perpetuate the risk and does not serve to promote safe lives.

The new offence in the Serious Crime Act closes the gap in the current legal framework in order to capture repeated or continuous coercive or controlling behaviour, specifically where that behaviour takes place in an ongoing intimate partner or inter-familial relationship.

## **Mind Myths | It's a cultural thing right ....?**

Culture can never be used as an excuse for abuse. If a cultural practice causes no physical or psychological harm that's fine but any belief or attitude that violates anyone's human and or civil rights would be considered an act of abuse according the Human Rights Act 1998. Sometimes communities confuse religious teachings with culture to normalise abuse. This includes forced marriage, FGM and honour-based violence. They are all a criminal offence in the UK. Survivors are imprisoned by cultural pressures entrenched in thinking they just have to endure this, or it will bring shame on family honour. This sustains abuse and is unacceptable. Abuse can occur across any cultural background. It is certainly not limited to just a few stereotypes. Any act of abuse or violation should be acknowledged, challenged and not normalised within society.

“ *The actions of individuals are influenced by the norms, values, language, and other cultural factors that are like the dust in the air that surrounds everyone. These cultural factors are ingrained in us from the day we are born and can play a role in either ending or perpetuating domestic abuse. My clients have described the cultural barriers that have prevented them from seeking help such as fear of dishonouring the family, shame and fear of being rejected by their community.* ”

-Naomi S

## **Mind Myths | I am not worthy of a healthy relationship**

Survivors are known to often continue the same pattern of toxic relationships. They may hold the core belief they are not worthy of a healthy happy relationship or choose partners or situations that mirror their past. They will find it hard to trust a new relationship. This vicious cycle can be broken with support, compassion and tools to move forward.

Clare's Law is the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme. It's named after Clare Wood, who was murdered in 2009 by her ex-boyfriend who had a history of violence against women. The scheme allows you to ask us about the information we hold on a person in relation to domestic abuse offences and convictions.

“ *Use the darkness of your past to propel you to a brighter future.* ”

— Donata Joseph

## **Mind Myths | Domestic abuse is a private family matter, and not a social issue!**

Often, when survivors disclose their abuse, no one listens to them, and no one asks them what they would like to happen next. A survivor led approach should be at the heart of support and build responses around needs and resources available. Domestic abuse happens every single day all over the world, and affects survivors of all ages, classes and backgrounds. It is a serious, widespread crime. Stigma and shame can also prevent the survivor from moving forward. It is essential survivors' voices are heard. Describing domestic abuse as a 'private family matter', minimises, condones and permits the cycle to continue without being challenged.

Domestic abuse is not just a private family matter and is a social issue. Violence and abuse incur high costs for society: hospital treatment, medication, court proceedings, lawyers' fees, imprisonment – not to mention the psychological and physical impact on those who experience it.

-Women's Aid

## SUPPORT AND HELP

When you see or hear any red flags – isolation, micro-management, rule-setting, financial control – respond carefully. The survivor will need compassion, empathy and support now more than ever even you feel frustrated, angry, helpless. Be patient and calm, keeping the lines of communication as open as you safely can. Try to communicate gently why the perpetrator's behavior is concerning, but try not to be too critical, which will only make a survivor defensive.

Try to keep in contact if possible. The perpetrator wants the survivor to be isolated – don't enable them. Be there, listen and support without judgement. Be mindful that watching a loved one suffer will take its toll. Remember self-care and know when to reach out as well.

## CODEWORD SCHEME

If someone is experiencing domestic abuse and need immediate help, ask for 'ANI' in a participating pharmacy. 'ANI' stands for Action Needed Immediately but also phonetically sounds like the name Annie. If a pharmacy has the 'Ask for ANI' logo on display, it means they're ready to help. They will offer a private space, provide a phone and ask if support from the police is needed or other domestic abuse support services.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

My name is Tahira Hussain (MA MSc CBP PG Dip CBT PG Cert APIMH BA (Hons) MBPsS). I have a 20-year career in mental health, community development and working in the housing sector. Qualified as a cognitive behavioural psychotherapist, I am a member of the BABCP and BPS.

Working as a training associate for national agencies I have utilised my own experiences and deliver a series of training packages aimed to

support staff, stakeholders and residents on a range of topics including mental health awareness, wellbeing, domestic abuse, safeguarding children & adults, equality & diversity and unconscious bias.



I am an executive member of the Manchester BAME Network and have been a trustee for the Big Life Group. I was also a trustee for Central Action Women's Aid for eight years.

I volunteer for various community groups delivering support at a grass roots level. Today, having overcome my own challenges, I work to help others. I deliver regular domestic abuse awareness workshops. I am keen to raise awareness with the hope that it will help to build resilience, self-esteem, and enable survivors living with domestic abuse to reach out for support.

I am a survivor.

## USEFUL CONTACTS

There are 24-hour National Domestic Violence Helplines and websites in all four nations of the UK:

- In England call 0808 2000 247
- In Wales call 0808 80 10 80
- In Northern Ireland call 0808 802 1414
- In Scotland call 0800 027 1234

You can also call these helplines for support and advice if you are worried about someone you know or are struggling to cope with the pressure of helping someone deal with their abuse.

Local domestic abuse services can be found on the [Woman's Aid Domestic Abuse Directory](#) at

Karma Nirvana is the specialist helpline for forced marriage and honour-based abuse. It is open Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm on 0800 5999 247.

FORWARD is the charity working on the issue of FGM.

Galop is a charity which runs the LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline 0800 999 5428

Men's Advice Line, for male victims, is at 0808 801 0327

Suzy Lamplugh Trust runs the National Stalking Helpline and Revenge Porn Helpline on 0345 6000 459

The Respect Phonenumber is for men who want to stop being abusive towards their partner: 0808 802 4040.

THRIVE &  
SHINE

Tara x