

THE IMPACT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON WOMEN'S HEALTH

Health comes first! It is with good health that we can live the lives we wish to and it is this which opens the door to endless possibilities. It is the driving force behind feeling and having control of our destinies, leading us to be active participants in our lives. It is this, which allows us to take care of ourselves and those that we love. The scope of good health is broad; it includes physical as well as mental health and the conditions of our lives as well. We are all aware that certain, unfortunate situations can arise to threaten and compromise our health and thereby transform our daily lives. This is also true of domestic violence.

Reality reveals that victims of domestic violence are at greater risk of developing health problems. These women find themselves living in an environment of constant fear, doubt and manipulation. Such a situation monopolises and robs a woman of all her energy thus affecting her physical as well as her mental well being. The heightened tension and sense of insecurity she continuously endures will have a pronounced impact on her physical well being. Manifestations of anemia, digestive problems, difficulties sleeping, eating disorders, hypertension, and ulcers are only a few examples of how violence can compromise a woman's physical health. Unfortunately, the scope of domestic violence is great and its consequences also extend to have a massive impact on a woman's mental health. Victims of such violence are five times more likely to develop depression, panic disorders and to experience severe anxiety, memory loss, etc. Furthermore, most women who have endured a violent episode are four times more likely to experience the symptoms associated to a major depression.

Did you know?

- 37 % of women who have endured an episode of violence, experience a high level of psychological distress, while this is only present in 18% of other women¹
- 6% of women who are victims of domestic violence experience suicidal thoughts, while this is only present in 1.4% of other women²

In exploring the impact of domestic violence, it is of significant importance to examine the impoverished and deteriorating life conditions these victims are forced to bear. In addition to the physical and psychological scars of domestic violence, victims will experience a striking decrease in their social supports and economic resources, thereby affecting the conditions of their daily lives. In effect, the disadvantages faced by these women are twofold. First they experience the direct consequences of domestic violence only to be victimised again by the hardships of poverty, absence of social supports, health problems, etc.

Take a moment and absorb the following situation reflecting an all too common reality faced by victims of conjugal violence.

¹ La violence conjugale ... c'est quoi au juste? RPMHTFWC, 2006

² Idem

A woman endures violence within the realm of an intimate relationship. As a result, she will suffer from symptoms of depression, a recognised and direct consequence of domestic violence. Because of the depression, she will be faced with a greater risk of encountering difficulties in her relationships with family and friends, experiencing a higher absenteeism at her place of work, suffering a loss of employment and then facing difficulties once she attempts to reintegrate the work force.

Regardless of the form or method used, violence exercised by an abusive partner will have an impact on all aspects of the victim's life. In dealing with these undeniable impacts and in hopes of re-establishing herself as well as her life, time and energy is essential to every victim of domestic violence. Access to shelters and community organisations who offer support and services to improve the health of these women, encourage financial autonomy and better their overall wellbeing is key to improving the lives of victims of domestic violence.

**You can also contact the following organisation for referral services:
SOS Violence Conjugale: 1-800-363-9010**

**And, if there is a threat of, or an actual occurrence of violence:
Please contact 911.**

«This article's serie has been created by the women's shelters of Laval. This original project has been financed by the Agence de la santé et des services sociaux de Laval.»