

1.2 Indicators of Abuse

Not all abusive relationships are the same - not all fit the cycle of violence; not all abuse results in physical injury; and not all women respond to abuse in the same way. However, all abuse can have devastating long-term consequences for women.

The following are some signs or indicators that may suggest that a woman is being or has been abused. While the presence of any one indicator is not conclusive proof of abuse, in most instances, abused women will exhibit a number of indicators.

Emotional and psychological indicators

The woman may:

- Seem timid, anxious, agitated, scared, exhausted, depressed or have a flat affect;
- Concede to the abuser to answer or make decisions on her behalf;
- Seem more concerned about the abuser's needs than her own needs or health concerns;
- Have heightened startle response;
- Have suicidal or homicidal thoughts;
- Report feeling isolated;
- Feel extremely angry; and/or
- Experience sleeplessness and/or nightmares.

Physical indicators

The woman may:

- Have visible injuries that may include, bruises, cuts, burns, black eyes, choke marks, bleeding injuries, chunks of hair pulled out, dental injuries;
- Have invisible injuries that include internal bleeding, punctured eardrums, fractures, sprains, pulled muscles, bruising, headaches, pain in the chest, stomach or pelvis, and old untreated injuries; and/or
- Minimize the seriousness of her injuries, or make excuses about how she received her injuries, such as blame herself for being clumsy or slipping down the stairs, or report being accident prone.

Sexual indicators

The woman may complain of:

- Unwanted touching;
- Recurring genital pain or infection;
- Sexually transmitted diseases;
- Forced, coerced, or non-consensual sexual activity; and/or
- Sex-trade work.

Financial indicators

The woman may:

- Indicate that the abuser controls all the money;
- Indicate that the abuser withholds money from her or gives her a strict allowance;
- Refuse to spend money without agreement of the abuser;
- Complain of non-disclosure of critical financial information (e.g. liabilities, investments, etc.);
- Report being coerced to assume financial liability; and/or
- Report not having access to independent financial advice.

Stalking or harassment

The woman may report being the victim of the following stalking behaviour:

- Receiving letters, e-mails, telephone calls;
- Receiving unwanted gifts;
- Mail being stolen;
- Being followed, watched or tracked;
- The abuser showing up uninvited;
- The abuser harassing her employer or colleagues;
- Her property being vandalized;
- Pets being harmed;
- Being physically or sexually assaulted;
- Being kidnapped or held against her will; and/or
- Receiving threats of harm herself or threats to her family and friends.

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1.5 Some Indicators Characteristic of the Abuser

Woman abusers have many characteristics in common and may exhibit similar behaviours. These might include, but are not restricted to the following:

- Refuses to separate from the woman, even for medical procedures;
- Tries to isolate the woman;
- Treats the woman or others forcefully, demanding information or action;
- Denies, minimizes, or rationalizes the abusive behaviour;
- Views the abusive behaviour as a justified response to anger, or as the only alternative response;
- Displays a “Jekyll and Hyde” personality;
- Acts overly attentive to the woman. The woman is unmoved by these gestures of affection, or does not appear to be comforted by them;
- Is absent despite the woman’s need for support;
- Controls actions and decisions of the woman;
- Denigrates the woman in front of others; and/or
- Manipulates the system to gain or maintain control over the woman, such as the mental health system, income security system, or when the police respond to a call.