MYTHS and FACTS about Relationship Violence

Relationship violence refers to a pattern of abusive behavior toward a current or former partner. Types of relationship violence includes: Verbal, Emotional, Physical and Sexual abuse.

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1. **MYTH:** Relationship violence occurs in a small percentage of relationships.
   **REALITY:** It is estimated that relationship violence occurs in ¼ to ⅓ of all intimate relationships. 1 in 5 college students reported some form of physical violence and abuse in their dating relationships. The rate of domestic violence in LGBT relationships is about the same as in heterosexual relationships.

2. **MYTH:** Abusers are unable to control their behavior.
   **FACT:** Violent behavior is a choice. Abusers use violence to control their partners. Relationship violence is a result of abusers using control, not losing control. Their actions are very deliberate. Abusers choose to be violent toward their partners in ways they would never consider treating other people.

3. **MYTH:** Alcohol and substance abuse are major causes of relationship violence.
   **REALITY:** Contrary to popular belief, relationship violence is not caused by alcohol use or stress. The only true cause of relationship violence is the abuser’s choice to act violently. Abusers use drinking as one of many excuses for their violence and as a way to place the responsibility for their violence elsewhere. Stopping the abuser’s drinking will not stop the violence. Both intimate partner abuse and substance abuse need to be addressed separately, as overlapping yet independent problems.

4. **MYTH:** Stress is a major cause of relationship violence.
   **REALITY:** Everyone experiences stress in their lives at some point, but the reality is that not everyone is abusive toward their partners. In other words, relationship violence is not caused by stress. The only true cause of relationship violence is the abuser’s choice to act violently.

5. **MYTH:** People who are abusive in their intimate relationships are violent in all of their relationships.
   **REALITY:** Most abusers do not use violence at the workplace or in other non-intimate relationships to solve conflict. Abusive partners choose to be violent toward their partners in ways they would never consider treating other people. Abuse occurs when the abuser exerts power and control over another.

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6. **MYTH:** A person who is abusive cannot be a loving partner.
   **REALITY:** When they are not being abusive, abusers are often described as loving, playful, affectionate, attentive, and sensitive partners.

7. **MYTH:** If those who are targeted by abuse didn't like it, they would leave.
   **REALITY:** Targets of intimate partner violence do not like the abuse. They stay in the relationship for many reasons, including fear. Most do eventually leave.

8. **MYTH:** Relationship violence is more common in heterosexual relationships than in LGBT relationships.
   **REALITY:** Members of the LGBT community are less likely to report incidents of relationship violence; however, it is estimated that 1 in 4 lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people are abused by a partner. All statistical data and estimates of LGBT domestic violence are proportionate to heterosexual domestic violence statistics.

9. **MYTH:** Men are never victims of relationship violence and women do not abuse.
   **REALITY:** Men can be, and are, abused by their female, male or transgender partners, although the data from domestic violence programs indicate that 95% of reported incidents of domestic violence are perpetrated by men against women.

10. **MYTH:** Most relationship violence victims report the violence to someone else.
    **REALITY:** Only 50% report the violence. Of those, 88% report the violence to a friend and 20% report to criminal justice authorities.

11. **MYTH:** Relationship violence occurs most often among low-income families.
    **REALITY:** Studies of domestic violence consistently have found that partner abuse occurs among all types of families, regardless of income, profession, region, ethnicity, educational level or race. However, the fact that lower income victims and abusers are over-represented in calls to police, domestic violence shelters and social services may be due to a lack of other resources.

12. **MYTH:** The violence can’t really be that serious.
    **REALITY:** Relationship violence is rarely a one-time occurrence and usually increases in frequency and severity. All forms of relationship violence, including verbal abuse, can have serious effects on the health and well-being of the person who is targeted by the violence.

13. **MYTH:** The target of the violence must be doing something to provoke the violence.
    **REALITY:** There are problems within any relationship, but it is never acceptable to use violence. Relationship violence is a tactic that an individual chooses to use in an attempt to exert power over and control their partner. The target of the violence is never to blame for the choice an abuser makes to use violence against a partner.
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14. MYTH: Someone who is targeted by violence should “just leave” the relationship.
   REALITY: The decision to end a relationship is not an easy one. There are many reasons that can lead an individual to stay in a relationship with someone who is abusing them. In most cases, the abuser is not always abusive.

15. MYTH: Relationship violence is a private matter.
   REALITY: Rather than being a personal problem, relationship violence has significant effects on individuals and on the entire community.

16. MYTH: If someone who is being abused wants help, they would ask for help.
   REALITY: Those who are targeted by abuse might not feel comfortable bringing up the issue. They might feel that they will not be understood or believed or that they will be judged. They are more likely to talk about their situation if they are approached by someone in a caring manner, someone who explains why they are concerned, tells them they do not deserve to be abused, and asks how they can help.