

Domestic Abuse Trauma

Domestic abuse is one of the most complex and misunderstood issues facing the world today. Although there are many papers, articles and documents written on the subject they do not go far enough to explain the trauma experience and the ramifications of being a survivor.

Rather than discuss the widely available information on domestic abuse that explains the different types of abuse this author intends to look at domestic abuse from the perspective of a victim and survivor, as there is a huge difference between studying domestic abuse on an academic level and actual experience. Most of the information currently available is written from a detached and clinical view of domestic abuse. There are so many questions left unanswered and the author accepts that every situation is different which complicates the issues that need to be addressed.

Victims do not ask to be abused. This is the first thing that seems to come up within society. The general public seem to believe that the victim is somehow allowing this behaviour towards them to continue and if it was that bad, they would just leave the situation.

So, let's put that myth to bed. By the time a victim realises that they are actually in an abusive situation they've already been conditioned to accept that they are at fault, and they have already been segregated from those who might be able to help them escape the abuse they are going through.

It is not a case of a person meets a potential partner and automatically realises the person is an abuser. They generally appear to be a kind, caring, loving person. There are no immediate warning signs to look out for. If someone comes across as aggressive, manipulative and or abusive when you first meet them you would not pursue any form of relationship with them or even speak to them again. How many times have you met someone and felt that something isn't right? This is our inbuilt detection system warning us of potential issues. How many times have you gone for a job interview and either left before the interview or deliberately failed the interview because something about the atmosphere within the building didn't resonate with yourself?

When house hunting people tend to view many different properties till, they find the perfect home for them. This is generally because the houses turned down, or area do not resonate within themselves. You can view 30 houses with the same number of bedrooms, bathrooms etc they may even consist of the same type of layout but till you find the one that feels like home you turn the others down. Some you might view more than once because you feel unsure of the property. We do the exact same thing with cars and many other expensive items.

However, when it comes to relationships, we tend to ignore things we would not ignore when we are spending money.

Why? Because we are not taught to look past the surface when it comes to relationships. This could be because we do not place a monetary value on a relationship or it could be because as much as we do not look at a relationship as being fleeting, we also do not take a long view perspective, instead we follow our hearts or our needs at that moment in time.

Teaching children in secondary school the difference between a good and bad relationship would go a long way in combatting domestic abuse. If we knew the red flags to look out for we might be able to lower the number of people who are subjected to abuse. At the same time if we taught classes

regarding what constitutes abuse within secondary school we have the potential to lower the number of people who turn into abusers. Tackling domestic abuse is not just about helping victims of abuse it is also about preventing abusers becoming abusers to start with. If we continue to allow bullies and abusers to blame their victims for the abuse they subject them to we are not tackling the issues at the root. We are just justifying their behaviour. Unfortunately, society plays into this rhetoric and it is the victims of domestic abuse who feel they are to blame and the abusers who walk away to perpetrate further abuse because their behaviour is not taken to task.

Would society willingly or accept the victim of a break-in being blamed for having their property broken into? Do we blame the owner of a car when they are the victim of car theft? Do we blame the victim of a hit and run or having their purse snatched? No, we immediately want the perpetrator taken to task and stopped. We do not blame the victims of snipers or murders, so why do we blame the victims of domestic abuse and rape?

The second myth about domestic abuse that needs to be addressed is that as soon as you start the relationship the abuse starts. This reporter can attest to the fact that this is generally not the case, in fact this reporter has not spoken to any survivors where this was the case. This is not to say that there are no such cases, rather that immediate abuse would be very rare.

In general, from the research undertaken by this reporter, most cases appear to start out as loving relationships. The abuse starts slowly during what professionals describe as the honeymoon period. That period where both parties are adjusting to the relationship and going out of their way to be appealing to the other person. It has also been stated by several people to this reporter that even whilst dating (not living together) the other persons behaviour did not appear to be abusive. However, with hindsight there were some warning behaviours.

When we break this down to a basic level humans have their own versions of a mating ritual. Anyone who understands the animal kingdom understand that all animals, insects etc have a mating ritual, which is hereditary and genetically coded into the animals DNA. Unlike the animal and insect kingdoms the human mating ritual is not so clearly defined. Some of the things that are universal across humans is that when we are looking for a mate are: grooming hair and or nails, dressing to impress, going outside their normal comfort zone or trying new things.

There are other events in life where we also act in a way that we believe is expected of us in society. Taking a gift with us to a birthday, engagement, baby shower event. Buying a new suit, dress, shoes, hat for a wedding. Or buying new clothes for a holiday. Being polite to people we would otherwise avoid at social gatherings. During our formative years we are taught manners, politeness and how to act appropriately in public. We are taught to ask how someone is, and when asked to politely say things like "I'm fine thank you". We are taught how to fit into society based on a set of archaic rules and regulations, handed down from generation to generation. How to be socially acceptable, hold ourselves physically, conduct ourselves verbally and physically in order to appease those around us. How to be studious and concise in our responses. How to work hard in order to gain respect.

These socially acceptable behaviours are taught to us so we can achieve better things, get a good, well-paid job / career, own our own houses, cars, and of course be a productive member of society.

However, these conditioning behaviours also open us to being abused. Not everyone who is socially conditioned as a child will be abused as adults, just like not everyone who is abused as a child will become an abuser. There are a multitude of circumstances that shape us into the people we become. However, it is this reporter's belief that the more we suppress what we feel during the conditioning period and the more we are encouraged to withhold information regarding negative

events and emotions the more we risk becoming susceptible to being controlled and abused as adults.

This isn't about any links between child abuse and becoming either a victim or perpetrator of domestic abuse this is about social conditioning and becoming a victim of domestic or other type of abuse. Even those who have not been subjected to child abuse but have extensive social conditioning can go on to become victims of domestic abuse. There is a lot of research that states child abuse victims are more likely to accept abusive relationships. However, these studies have not gone on to look at normal social conditioning. The only speak when spoken to rules within education, not telling on bullies, ignoring verbal abuse within education and the hierarchy within social groups outside of education. The no snitch policies etc. This extends to social media, gaming environments and other online participations as there is a false sense of security for everyone involved.

As much as this indicates a situation involving many types of abuse and radicalisation the reporter is primarily interested in the connection between social conditioning of all forms and domestic abuse. However, it is only right to establish that other forms of abuse can occur as a result of social conditioning.

This could also explain why the percentage of domestic abuse victims are female and why males who experience domestic abuse are less likely to speak out regarding such abuse.

The reporter is in no way stating that females are more susceptible to abuse or that males are not impacted as much by domestic abuse. When we look at the differences between male and female social conditioning we can see that there is more social conditioning centred on females as they are also conditioned where clothing, body type etc is concerned whereas, males are more conditioned to accept rough play. Females are taught to be more fragile, caring, responsible for others emotions. Males are taught to be tougher, stronger, physically exertive.

Learning how to fit into society is an integral part of development, adhering to rules and regulations are necessary for adulthood. Without understanding the rules of society how would anyone fit into a working environment or be productive members of society? However, as much as these rules are in place for a reason we also need to ensure that our children know how to defend themselves and how to avoid becoming victims of abuse. As always there is a fine line to tread, and we would need to ensure that whilst removing the code of silence and acceptance we do not create a new generation of adults who believe that they cannot be challenged or challenge everything.

In 1872 Heinzmann conducted an experiment where he found that if you place a frog in cold water and heat it slowly the frog does not attempt to escape the hot water, rather it will sit there and be boiled alive. There is also an established belief that if you keep a horse confined in a stable for long enough you can open the stable door and the horse will not try to leave. This it seems depends on the type of horse and how long it has been kept in the stable before the door is left open.

Both of these examples are different types of conditioning. The frog sits in cold water, a natural environment for the frog and it is unaware of the temperature around it getting hotter. The horse becomes used to it's environment on a different level as temperature etc are prone to change. However, both of these forms of conditioning can be viewed as a form of grooming. It is well known that many victims of child abuse are groomed before the abuse becomes physical.

For victims of domestic abuse the grooming phase can start off as concern for health, emotional and mental wellbeing etc. the abuser will act as if this is a loving or protective gesture. Yet, it is still grooming. Like the frog the victim is unaware of the subtle changes in their environment. Like the horse, the victim is acclimatised to their surroundings and becomes fearful of the outside world. The perpetrator of the abuse becomes the victim's constant and when they try to challenge the behaviour or push boundaries the abuser then starts the threats, slowly and subtly till the victim is fearful of reprisals. Of course because of the social conditioning aspect they do not speak out when people ask if they are okay etc. They have been conditioned not to snitch.

This is why victims stay in an abusive situation longer than they should. They could have children by this time and not know how they will cope in a different environment. Financially dependant on the abuser, estranged from family and friends.

The fight, flight or freeze aspect of the brain starts to kick in. The victim is already living in hypervigilance mode on a subconscious level. The pathways in the brain have already been altered to accept a non-standard way of living. This has become their normal, anything outside of that creates a fear response. Where periods of kindness have been broken by abuse they also learn to fear any form of concern or kindness as a prelude to hatred and violence. The core personality of the victim has been suppressed or destroyed by the abuser till only the traits the abuser allows are left.

Imagine a rock, doesn't matter what size the rock is as long as it is a rock. Then imagine pouring a gallon of water over the rock. The rock might move from the force of the water but it will remain the same size and strength as it was before the water was poured over it. Now imagine that same rock sitting in a cave where water can seep through above and drip relentlessly over time onto the same spot. Science will attest that over time the rock will start to erode where the water hits it and given long enough the size, shape and strength of the rock will change.

This may sound immaterial to the subject of domestic abuse but when you change the rock to the brain of the abuse victim and the water to the words and actions of the abuser it is easier to visualise the damage which is done over time and where the human brain is concerned it does not take as long to change the structure of the brain, thought processes compared to the structure of the rock.

The change in thought process, which, for those of you who are unaware is completely subconscious, is why these victims stay in the abusive situation. They may have been told that the abuser will kill themselves if the victim leaves. They may have been told they can leave but can't take the children. They may have been told that no-one will believe them if they speak out. They may have no money of their own in order to survive, be fearful of the police and other agencies to whom they could go for help. There are hundreds of different reasons why the victim stays. This does not equate to the abuse can't be that bad or that they are lying. Studies and research in recent years has shown that the most dangerous time for a victim is between them deciding to leave and a few weeks / months after they have left because the abuser realises that they have lost control of the victim and tries to re-establish that control. Please remember that abuse has nothing to do with the victim's actions or emotions, it has nothing to do with love or hate it is just about the abuser wanting to dominate and control the victim.

Why does the victim suddenly decide to leave an abusive relationship, sometimes years after it started?

This question is much harder to answer. Friends, family, professionals may have spent, weeks, months or years trying to get the victim to leave, to get them to realise that they are being abused etc. The victim will appear reluctant to leave, they might accept it is abuse but then continue in the

relationship. This can be very frustrating for the friends, family and professionals who believe they are wasting their time trying to help the victim. However, at no point do any of these people take into consideration the level of grooming and mind control that has gone into the abuse. They seem to believe that by pointing out different things that the victim will see the light and leave. In fact many social workers do not mention the words domestic abuse to the victim and if they do they do not give clear indication of how they are supposed to extract themselves and any children from the situation. The same goes for family, friends and other professionals. Understandably, this is a frustrating time for everyone involved in the situation.

Without knowledge of what the abuser uses as a control mechanism to keep the victim subdued it is difficult to extract the victim from the situation.

However, in the majority of cases something switches in the victims brain and they decide it is time to leave. This switch can happen at any time. It is like all the pieces suddenly fall into place and they realise what is going on. Even then there can be a delay period between the realisation and the leaving, the longer this delay the more chance there is that the abuser will cloud the victims mind and regain control. Sometimes this switch happens at the onset of a pregnancy, house move, change of job etc. Other times it can be caused by a phrase or catching the abuser out in a lie. There is no set formula for this switch but when it happens the victim has to be more vigilant than before whilst masking their true intentions so that the abuser does not suspect the change.

It is also important to realise that even after the victim has regained control of their life the abuse and impact of that abuse doesn't suddenly vanish. Yes, they can be physically safe from the abuser but the mental and emotional healing takes longer and often leads to mental health conditions such as PTSD.

The victim has regained physical possession of their lives, they will still believe that they are worthless, that they cannot do some things for themselves. They can struggle with simple things like making a drink or cooking. Not because they are incapable of these things but because they have been continuously told that they need the abuser in order to function, pay bills, cook, do household chores etc. The extent of this confused or self-doubting state will depend on the level of abuse and years spent being conditioned.

They are in essence starting to learn how to live in a new environment and starting back out on their own. This is the time where they need understanding and compassion rather than punishment and condemnation. It is also normal during this transition period for the victim to miss the abuser and for them to be triggered by the mentioning of the abuser's name. This can also cause the victim to seem unsure and needy as they are looking for validation of their own abilities.

Unfortunately, when they are in this transition period, they are also open and vulnerable to other forms of abuse. They may reach out on social media platforms for help and support as they look for others who have successfully transitioned through this period, looking for answers to know if what they are feeling is normal. It only takes talking to the wrong person for their abuse to continue on a different level. Yes, there are many different organisations who offer support and therapy during this transition period. The reporter knows of at least one incident where a victim was in a group therapy by a well known organisation and was asked to leave because what she'd been through was more extensive over a longer period of time than those organising the therapy could handle. This led to professionals stating that they didn't think she could change in time to be of benefit to her children and her children were removed from her care. This is the ultimate in victim-blaming and re-victimisation. Not only was she trying to recover from years of abuse, but the authorities proved her

abuser correct and removed her children. The abuser had spent years telling her that if she spoke out about the abuse the authorities would remove her children. This lady then spent years feeling as if the authorities were treating her as the criminal and that the abuser got off without any ramifications.

This is part of the system which needs to change to avoid these kinds of feelings and thoughts where the victim is concerned. Although, the example used above is that from the perspective of a mother, this author knows of fathers who have also experienced similar situations. As such, this is a gender-neutral issue and if society wants to avoid the perpetuation of abuse by professionals it needs to be addressed and professionals need a better understanding of the domestic abuse trauma response as well as the mechanics of abuse on a more identifiable front.

Unfortunately, many of our current perspectives on different subjects are still based on archaic ideologies and research. Where autistic spectrum disorder is concerned the majority of research initially carried out was on young males, as such it is still harder for a female to be diagnosed. Whereas, for domestic abuse the majority of research and information is female based and as such it is more difficult for a male to seek help. Especially, when we look at refuges. There are many more women's refuges for abuse victims than there are male refuges. Currently, according to research there are fewer than 10 male refuges for victim of domestic abuse in the UK. This situation is disproportionate to the number of women's refuges. Moreover, there still are not enough women's refuges, which proves the magnitude of domestic abuse within the country.

Although exact numbers are not disclosed, there is also a correlation between the number of children being looked after by the local authority and domestic abuse. Freedom of information requests reveal that the local authorities would need to check each file individually in order to provide details where this subject is concerned, just as they would need to check individual files to report number of parents who have suffered from mental health issues as a result of children being removed. As such, the reporter can not give statistics on these issues.

If we wish to reduce the number of children being taken into care each year, we need to research how many of these children have been removed due to domestic abuse. We also need more research to find the connection between children being removed and the strain on our mental health services and benefits agencies.

However, this much needed research also leads to the issue of how long this research would take and the damage being done to both innocent parents and children until the system is changed for the better. Surely, there is a better way to help victims of domestic abuse and their children whilst the research is undertaken, and changes implemented to avoid further distress and strain on already overburdened systems. Politicians and professionals will tell you that the costs involved in changing the system of implementing a temporary or interim measures wouldn't be effective. However, when we take into account that changing the system would not only lower the number of children being taken into care but also lower the costs to the health, benefit, housing and legal systems the initial changes would actually lower the yearly budget and also reduce the strain on current systems.

In an ideal world the perpetrators of abuse would undergo a rehabilitation programme to avoid further issues of domestic abuse in the future. Victims of abuse would be given help and support so they can regain their self-esteem, confidence, body image, improve their education, keep their children with them in order to provide a stable home environment and all concerned would have a higher chance of being productive members of society. This would also lower the number of

survivors who become addicts, lower the mental and or physical health issues, long term benefits use etc.

At the same time if the education surrounding domestic abuse was introduced into secondary schools there would also be a decrease in future perpetrators and victims, lowering the need for rehabilitation and support for adults.

There is no quick fix for this issue. A long term perspective needs to be taken and adaptations to how this issue is looked at, education, help and support would also need to be ongoing as society changes and adapts.

When looking at domestic abuse it is advisable to also look at the different parts of society that are affected as a result, what different systems are linked into the detection and prevention of domestic abuse as well as the services that do not immediately jump out as being affected by domestic abuse, like mental health, education, legal and housing services. Each change will impact another service within the system and those changes also need to be addressed so that the different systems work in tandem with each other.

This brings us back to social conditioning. People have stopped questioning things, instead they're just accepted or ignored. Society is scared about being labelled or attacked if they ask questions or disagree with popular opinion. This reporter suggests that you investigate the psychological experiments on compliance to see how the subjects changed their behaviour to fit in with the majority and how many of these experiments were rigged by actors or academics to change the outcome of the experiments. For example, Asch's conformity experiments.

By looking at things like psychological conformity experiments, advertising, trends, etc it is easier to understand how a person can become a victim of domestic abuse.

Society has been trying to eradicate all forms of abuse for over 100 years, yet they are using the same techniques or variations of those same techniques during this time frame and wonder why things have not changed. If what you are doing isn't working, change what you are doing. Isn't this something we are also taught? That you can not continue to do the same thing and expect a different outcome.

Which, to this reporter means it is time we changed what we are doing in order to change the outcome. Stop mentioning the abusers name during professional meetings that include the victim. Stop expecting the victim to stop the abuse themselves because if they were able to stop the abuse from happening, it wouldn't have happened to begin with. Stop blaming the victims and start helping them in a constructive way and this also includes bringing up their previous abuse years later because people do evolve and change over time.

This would also mean that those people who use false allegations of domestic abuse as an excuse for their behaviour or as a weapon against the other person should also be taken to task. Pretending to be a victim should be dealt with in the same way as the perpetrator of abuse and should be classed as socially unacceptable.