

Violence Against Women in Relationships

INFORMATION BULLETIN FOR POLICE

Introduction

- This bulletin provides information which may assist police respond to calls involving violence against women in relationships, and covers the actions and behaviours associated with violence, including criminal harassment. Such calls may come from the victim's family members, friends, or support persons. The police may face unique challenges in these situations.
- The information is a reminder of the complex and dangerous nature of violence against women in relationships, which can create circumstances that lead to tragedy. This information also applies where the victim of relationship violence is male or where the partners are the same sex.
- Officers are advised to consult the Ministry of Attorney General Policy on Violence Against Women in Relationships and their own department or detachment's operational policies for operational procedures to be followed in cases of violence against women in relationships.

Dynamics of Abuse of Power:

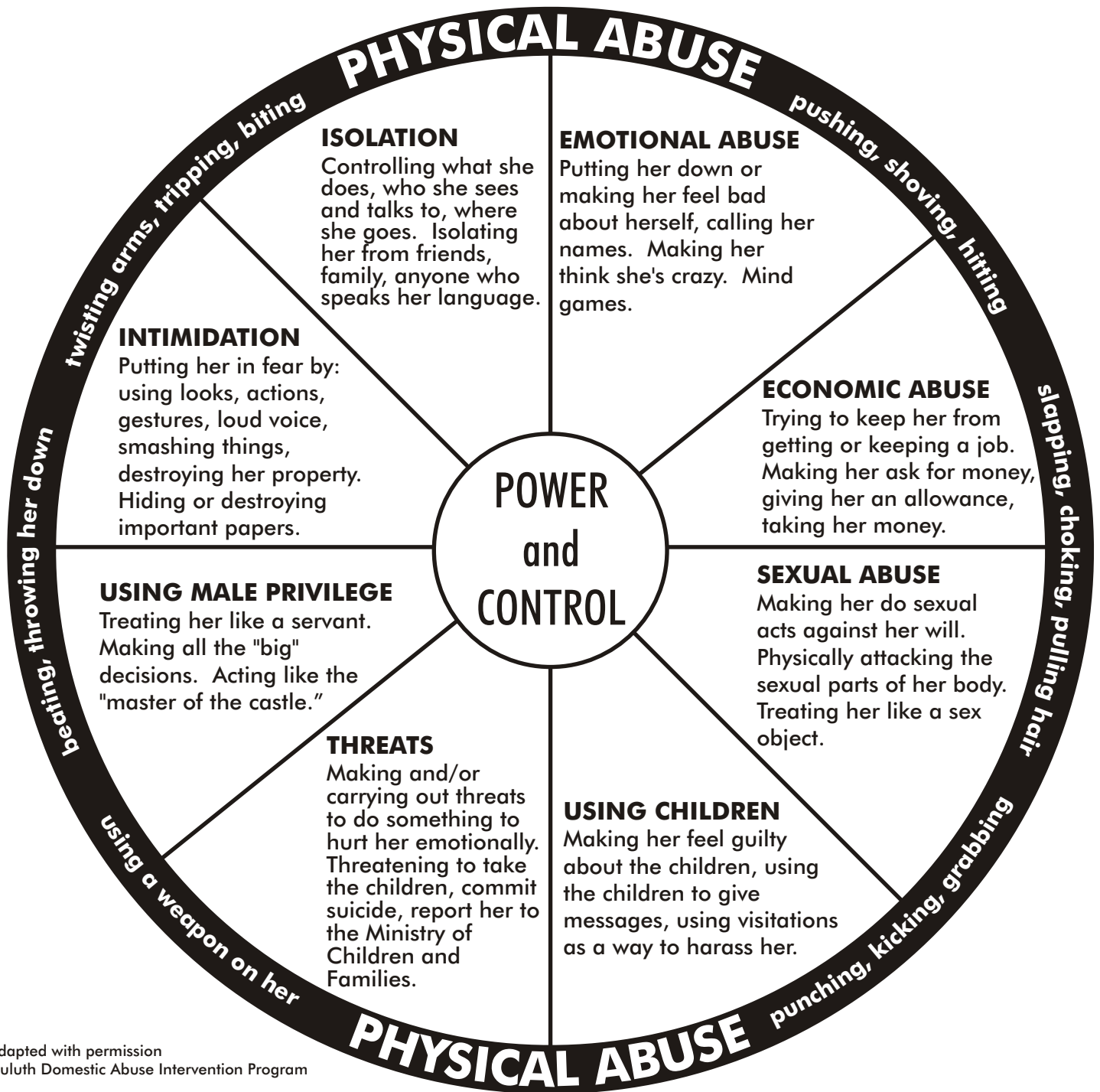
- Domestic disputes are emotional and volatile. They are dangerous and potentially fatal for the woman, her children and anyone else present.
- It may be difficult for women to report abuse, pursue legal action or end the relationship because of:
 - fear for her safety or that of her children
 - fear that her children will be apprehended
 - influence of her extended family or children
 - emotional attachment and loyalty to the abuser
 - low self esteem and self blaming
 - economic dependency on the abuser
 - religious values or pressure from cultural community
 - fear of deportation
 - social isolation and lack of a support system
 - denying, minimizing, or rationalizing the severity of the violence
 - lack of legal information about her rights
- If the woman leaves the relationship, the violence may continue or worsen. In fact a woman, her family, friends and support persons may be at the greatest risk of violence after she leaves her abusive partner.
- Abusive behavior can be directed not only against the victim but against her children, relatives, friends, supporters, work colleagues, pets and/or possessions, or towards anyone who tries to intervene.
- Symptoms of the abusive use of power and control in relationships (see the Power and Control Wheel) can include physical violence, sexual assault, intimidation, coercion, threats, emotional or verbal abuse, economic control or isolation.
- An abuser may also influence or manipulate the children involved, or use his social status and privilege in the community as part of his abusive behavior. He may try to use the courts to harass his partner. He may minimize or deny the violence/abuse or blame the victim as another method of exerting power and control.
- Police may need to establish whether other family members, friends or supporters might also be in danger.
- If other members of the family, such as in-laws, close friends or relatives do not support involving the police, it is often difficult for the woman to report the abuse and pursue legal action, especially if her isolation and lack of support are pervasive.
- Where other family members or relatives live in the home, police may have to take special care to speak to the woman alone. In some cultures this may be problematic. Police are advised to consult their local specialized or other victim services for appropriate strategies to deal with interpretation, chaperoning and unique family dynamics. In these circumstances the victim's safety may be at risk if left in the house, even if the abuser is removed. On the other hand family members may also be at risk from the abuser. Police must take these dynamics into account when considering the victim's safety.
- Women from some cultures may have a fear of the police due to previous experiences of police in their home country. Strategies will need to be carefully worked out with representatives from immigrant serving agencies.
- The attending officer should ensure that the woman has access to a specialized victim assistance worker and/or multi cultural support worker who can assist her with safety and resources. Police need to be familiar and work with multi cultural victim serving organizations in their community.
- A lack of English language skills can be a barrier to communicating with service providers and clear understanding about the legal and social service systems. When the woman does not speak English and the abuser does, it is extremely important that the police interview the woman with the aid of a support worker who speaks that language.
- Children should not be asked to become involved by acting as interpreters.
- A woman who is newly arrived or has visitor status in Canada is particularly vulnerable if the abuser sponsored her immigration. She may believe that if she leaves him or reports the abuse, he may withdraw his sponsorship and she might be deported. She may also be afraid that her children will be apprehended.

Police Response – Arrest, Investigation and Coordination:

- The authority for police to arrest in VAWIR cases is found in the Criminal Code. The VAWIR policy offers guidance about how to exercise discretion in arresting in VAWIR cases. The policy is consistent with the Code arrest provisions, which allow police to arrest when it is in the public interest to do so. The policy states:
 - “Police officers, when there are grounds to believe an offence has occurred, should always arrest when it is in the public interest, including when it is necessary to secure the accused’s attendance in court, or prevent the repetition of the offence or the commission of other offences (including interference with the administration of justice and intimidation of witnesses)”. [*VAWIR Policy, 1996, p.5.*]
- The following practice tips have been developed in consultation with representatives from the RCMP and municipal police on the Ministry of Attorney General Violence Against Women in Relationships Policy Implementation Committee.
- When dealing with matters involving violence against women in relationships, police should consider the following:
 - what protective measures should be included in an undertaking?
 - what protective conditions should be recommended in a report to Crown counsel? and
 - what conditions might be required to protect other persons, who have been threatened, harassed, or are at risk as a result of the dispute?
- Investigation of all alleged abuse should include direct contact with the victim and follow up with other family members and witnesses such as neighbours if appropriate, photographs of injuries, and medical reports from doctors.
- All parties, in particular the accused, should be interviewed in a separate location from the victim and her family.
- When investigating allegations of violence against women in relationships, investigators should consider all incidents of violence, intimidation or threats to family members, friends, supporters and former partners, and take the necessary steps to link all related complaints.
- Ascertain if there has been a history of violence with the abuser, including any incidents reported in other jurisdictions involving both violence in relationships and other crimes against persons. It may be necessary to contact relevant police detachments for any information related to the complainant and the accused. All related incidents should be cross-referenced in such a way as to alert investigators to the existence of related documentation.
- Officers should consider whether the conduct reported may constitute criminal harassment of the victim, her family, friends or supporters.
- A complete history of all offences should be conducted and included in a report to Crown counsel.
- It is important to ensure that a woman has access to support services. The attending officer should refer the victim, with her consent, to a community based specialized victim service in accordance with local protocols. In communities where a specialized victim service does not exist, police should refer her to police-based or crown-based victim service.

You may download additional copies of this publication and find other information on Violence Against Women in Relationships listed under publications on website:

www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/victim_services



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Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Program

The Power & Control Wheel is an image developed by victim service workers and abused women to illustrate a range of abusive tactics used against women. Physical and sexual violence are often combined. The threat to a woman's physical safety intensifies her experience of all other abuses. An abuser may use any combination of a number of different techniques to assert his power and control over his partner. These may be physical, sexual, emotional or economic in nature.

Each spoke of the wheel represents a particular tactic (economic abuse, emotional abuse or threats). The rim of the wheel, which gives it strength and holds it together, is the physical abuse. At the hub or centre of the wheel is the abuser's intention to hold onto power and control.