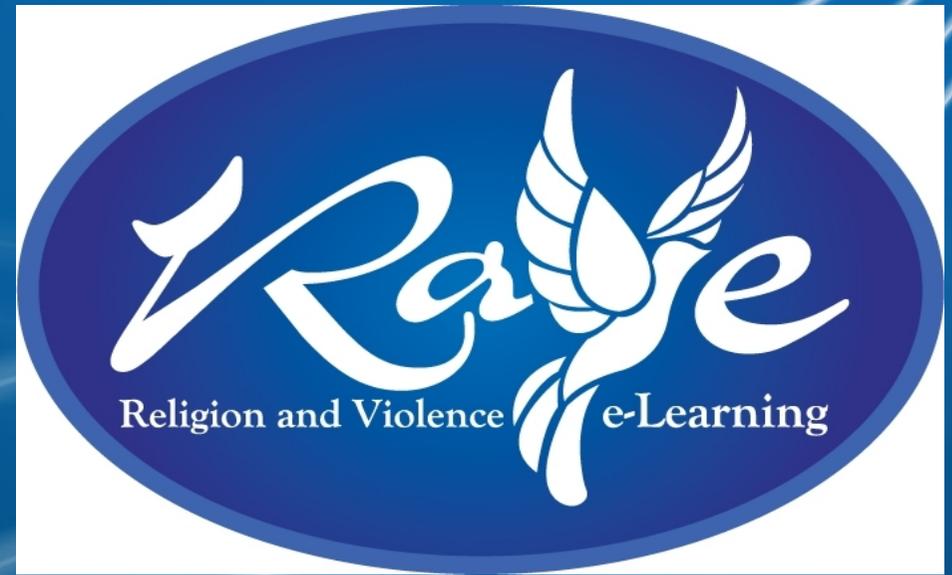


Considering Abuse and Violence Terminology



Learning Objectives

In this lesson you will:

1. consider the various terms that are used in the literature on domestic violence including family violence, abuse, violence against women and wife assault;
2. discover the rationale behind the use of selected terms;
3. address the possible implications of labels attached to abusive behaviour.

What happened?

What terms are used to describe what has happened?

Violence, violation, assault, abuse, battery . . .

Many advocates and researchers refer to this as violence, such as family violence and violence against women. However, sometimes it is called abuse, including wife abuse, child abuse and elder abuse. Many believe that the term "abuse" is more inclusive of physical violence as well as other forms of battery. Verbal abuse is often just as painful as physical assault. With this in mind it is important to include all forms of violations in our definitions.

Who did it happen to?



Who has been violated?

Sometimes we refer to this person as a **victim** because they have been the target of abuse.

Other times we refer to them as **survivors**, because they have lived with abuse but are learning to move beyond these experiences, hopefully achieving a violence-free existence.

Who is responsible?

It is also important to consider how we refer to individuals who abuse or batter another person.

Perpetrators, batterers, abusers . . .

We often refer to these people as batterers or perpetrators because they are responsible for the harm they have caused against another person.

Sometimes we refer to them as men (or women) who have acted abusively.

Things to consider . . .

Why does it matter what words we use to describe abuse?

Why might a woman prefer to be described as a survivor?

Why might a man who has acted abusively in the past, but has stopped the violence, want to be called a man who has acted abusively?

These are all questions that will be considered in future lessons. For now, let's consider the various terms that are used to describe abusive situations.



Family Violence

Family violence is a term that is often used to describe abusive behaviours that happen in the home.



Family Violence

Our homes are supposed to be safe place, sanctuaries where we feel loved and protected. But many homes are dangerous places and that danger may come at the hands of a family member.

The Justice Department of Canada defines family violence as "a term that includes the many different forms of abuse, mistreatment or neglect that adults or children may experience in their intimate, kinship or dependent relationships." (www.justice.gc.ca/en/ps/fm/familyvfs.html)

Family violence is a term commonly used to describe abuse. It can be thought of as an umbrella term that covers all forms of violence that occur within the home.

Examples of family violence

Family violence is often abusive actions perpetrated against a **significant other**, often a wife or a common-law partner.

It can also include **child abuse**. Family violence includes parents who use excessive discipline, resulting in harm to a child.

Sometimes family violence occurs when a child, perhaps a teenager, is **verbally abusive** to a parent or to another sibling.

Family violence may even include the **abuse of elderly** family members living in the home.

Other terms

Sometimes family violence is called **domestic violence**.

Other people refer to it as **domestic abuse**.

Can you think of other terms that you have heard used to address family violence?



Things to consider . . .

Why might some advocates be opposed to using the term "family violence"?

What does it say about the abuse?



Forms of abuse



There are various forms of abuse.

Abuse can be:

- physical
- psychological or emotional
- sexual assault
- isolation
- controlling the victim's time, money, food, shelter, etc.

Challenges in defining abuse

How we define abuse is one of the most important considerations that researchers, assistance providers and advocates can make.

Some issues to consider:

- How do we define abuse?
- What constitutes abuse?
- How do we know when victims are hiding their painful experiences?



Definitions

What should be included as violence?

We know that the majority of research on violence against women focuses on physical violence. Fewer researchers look at psychological abuse, economic control, etc.

What are the differences between physical and psychological abuse?

Source: Renzetti, Edleson, & Bergen, 2001, *Sourcebook on Violence Against Women*.



Broad definitions

Broad definitions argue that abuse is multi-dimensional in nature, including various forms of violence. Such definitions recognize that abuse is not limited to physical violence. It includes emotional abuse, sexual assault, financial control, threats of violence, as well as many other harmful actions.

We know that many women will tell us that emotional abuse can be more painful than physical violence.

Source: Renzetti, Edleson, & Bergen, 2001, *Sourcebook on Violence Against Women*.

Narrow definitions



Narrow definitions focus on precise, legalistic terms of criminal acts. When such definitions are used, many women believe that the definition does not apply to their experience. Such definitions are believed to artificially lower incident rates.

In fact, advocates worry about rates in such studies and fear that they may reduce the chances that women will seek assistance. If our definitions fail to identify the various forms of violence, many abused women may be reluctant to name their own experiences.

Source: Renzetti, Edleson, & Bergen, 2001, *Sourcebook on Violence Against Women*.

Reaching consensus in defining violence against women

Many researchers and advocates are moving towards the use of a broad definition. One of the benefits of using a broad definition is that it can be helpful in uncovering additional abuses. When we acknowledge actions such as name calling as abuse, it can help women recognize the many forms of abuse.

Source: Renzetti, Edleson, & Bergen, 2001, *Sourcebook on Violence Against Women*.

Intimate Partner Violence



An intimate partnership is a term that describes the relationship that someone has with her/his significant other. It can include couples who are dating, living together in a common law relationship, or who are married.

While we hope that intimate partnerships would be safe, nurturing and mutually beneficial, we know that they can also be harmful.

Intimate Partner Violence

According to the U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC), intimate partner violence can be defined as "physical, sexual or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse. This type of violence can occur among heterosexual or same-sex couples and does not require sexual intimacy."

(www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/ipvoverview.htm)

Intimate partner violence occurs when someone is abused by her/his significant other. While women are more likely to be victimized in intimate partner violence, they also can be perpetrators of the abuse.

Violence Against Women

Violence against women (VAW) is another term that can be used to describe the experiences of many women.



According to the World Health Organization violence against women is "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."

(www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/index.html)

Examples of Violence Against Women

VAW includes partner abuse as well as assaults by complete strangers. Incidents of violence against women can include:

- women who are beaten by their husbands;
- young women who are forced into sexual trafficking;
- women who are sexually harassed in the workplace;
- college-aged girls who are victims of date rape;

- young girls who are forced to endure female circumcision;
- older women who are stalked, assaulted and robbed.

These are but some examples of violence against women. Future lessons will explore the various forms of VAW in greater detail.

Other terms used

Violence against women includes other specific terms:

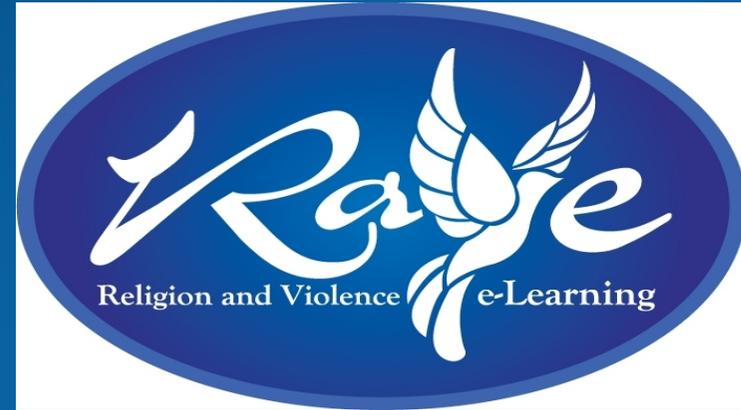
- **Wife assault** is a term that may be used by professionals, including law enforcement officers. It can also be called wife abuse.
- **Battery** includes "behavior that physically harms, arouses fear, prevents a woman from doing what she wishes, or forces her to behave in ways she does not want. Battering includes

the use of physical and sexual violence, threats and intimidation, emotional abuse and economic deprivation.

- **Dating violence** is another field of study that explores the violations between dating partners, often including teenagers in romantic relationships.



Things to consider . . .



Men are also targets of violence and abuse. And men have unique challenges in responding to abusive situations. We will consider the impact of abuse of men in more detail in later sessions.

Yet women are far more likely to be the victims of abuse than are men. While we are making inroads in reducing the incidents of abuse, we still have a long way to go. Future lessons will highlight the challenges faced by advocates who work to reduce and eliminate all incidents of violence against women.

Summary

Nancy Nason-Clark and her research team have been working with victims and perpetrators of violence for nearly twenty years.

We have heard countless stories from women who have been victimized by both physical and emotional abuse. What we hear, time and time again, is that the emotional abuse is often worse than the physical abuse.

Families can wear a smile, portray an image that masks the pain they experience within the walls of their home. Please remember that just because an abused woman may not have physical wounds does not mean that she has not been scarred by emotional abuse.