

FACTS

against

MYTHS

VIKAS ADHYAYAN KENDRA

Vol V # 12/99

INFORMATION BULLETIN

PATRIARCHAL FEARS & MISOGYNIC ASSAULTS: MYTHS ON GENDER VIOLENCE – II

COMMENT

Violence against women is any violation of a woman's personhood, mental or physical integrity, or freedom of movement through individual acts and social oppression. It includes all the ways society objectifies and oppresses women through various forms, many of which are historically sanctioned. With foeticide and female infanticide in India — female circumcism in parts of Africa — violence against women continues to be widespread not just in India but the world over.

Government statistics, itself, testify to this reality. Figures presented in Parliament showed that in 1988 there were, for instance, 11,259 dowry-related murders and 3,893 reported cases of rape. Citing the Bureau of Police Research and Development there were 20,000 rape crimes in 1985. The 1996 Crime in India Bulletin of the Government of India also showed that in the total, 1,15,733 cases, under separate crime heads, had been registered as crimes against women as against 1,09,259 such cases in 1995. Evidently, there has been an upsurge of 5.9 per cent since 1995 and as much as 56.2 per cent since 1991. (Cf. latest figures on pg.2) More disturbing has been the increase in the disparity in the ratio between men and women. The Census of India 1991 records that there were 945 women per 1,000 men in 1991, down from 976 women per 1,000 men (0-6 years) in 1961; Punjab (875 women per 1,000 men and Haryana (879). Even in a highly literate State,

Kerala, has reflected this nationwide trend with its female population in the under-6 age-group falling from 972 in 1961 to 958 per 1000 men.

The worldwide resurgence in violence against women led the UN General Assembly on February 23, 1994 to adopt a special Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women. The Declaration stressed that the same covered all gender-based violence causing physical and emotional harm to women, whether it occurs in public or private life and Art.2 of the Declaration is exhaustive. It acknowledges that women suffer violence because of their gender. It includes acts which are "private" whereby ends the dichotomy between public and private. The Declaration enjoins the States to condemn violence against women and should not invoke any custom, tradition or religious sanction avoid their obligation with respect to its elimination. Since this Convention, other equally important measures have come into effect. The 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme for Action calls such violence as violence of the human rights of a majority of the world's population. It calls clearly for increased coordination on human rights within the UN and for the equal status and human rights of women. Another important measure is the 'Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women' (CEDAW), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1976 and is the International Bill of Rights of Women. CEDAW became effective on September 3, 1981, ratified by 165 countries and by India in 1993.

Violence against women manifests in various forms some of which remain unexposed, viz.,

CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN			
Crime Head	Year		% variation in 1998 over 1997
	1997	1998	
Rape	15330	15031	+2.0
Kidnapping & Abductioin	15617	16381	4.9
Dowry Death	6006	6917	15.2
Torture	36592	41318	12.9
Molestation	30764	31046	0.9
Sexual Harassment	5796	8123	40.1
Importation of Girls	78	146	87.2
Sati Prevention Act	1	0	100.0
Immoral Traffic (P) Act	8323	8695	4.5
Indeent Rep. of Women (P) Act	73	192	163.0
Dowry Prohibition Act	2685	3489	29.9
Total	121265	131338	8.3

Source: Indian Express, March 8, 2000

a) the unacknowledged crime of domestic violence minimally construed¹ as the physical, emotional, sexual and psychological abuse of the adult women in her intimate relationships. It includes all the intimidating acts by the members (men and women) of her marital family, b) The brutality of the Indian Varna system/caste hierarchy that manifests itself in the rising atrocities of Dalits and Dalit women. The National Crime Records Bureau² for instance reported that in 1997 alone there were 8,500 reported crimes against Dalits. Of these, 302 were rapes of Dalit women. On December 1, 1997, at Laxmapur-Bathe in Bihar the upper-caste Ranvir Sena raped and murdered 5 Dalit girls and killed 27 women. In February 1988 a group of 14 policemen looted, terrorised and resorted to mass rape of Dalit women in Pasaria village of Bihar. Registered cases of rape against Dalit women were 1173 in 1989, 1163 in 1990, 1067 in 1991 and 1236 in 1992 c) in the North-East the State machinery under the facade of "counter-insurgency operations" resorts to atrocities against the locals including women, d) the killing of women as witches, particularly in the Adivasi communities.³ In 1988, 200 women on an average were killed every year in Singbhum district alone as they were thought to be witches. e) victimisation of widows by members of the husband's family, severely effecting her self-esteem and self-worth.

Of these crime statistics, 35 per cent represent domestic violence. In 1996 it constituted the major kind of crimes amongst all forms of violence against women. In defining domestic

violence it is, however, also necessary to comprehend women's day-to-day experience of gendered violence within the family context. The wide range of violence that women experience is *not* regarded as acts of criminal violence within the Establishment. Inadequacies of legal expressions, encapsulating women's experience, helps in silencing women and towards making such violence invisible. This enables the patriarchal social value and legal systems to defend male violence as typical and as an aberration. Similarly, dominant social and psychological interpretations and models on gender violence reinforce the trivialising of women's

experience. It views that gender violence is a pathological phenomenon rooted in factors such as mental illness e.g. neurosis, emotional deprivation, sexual frustrations, problematic childhood, disrupted family history, among other such related problems. Other theories and misconceptions that blame the victims, impute pathology to women themselves accusing them of "provoking" violent behaviour due to their constant nagging, being "too talkative" or people who are sado-masochists. These and other such gender-blind theories, etc., fail to pin down the responsibility of violence on the man. It is basically men who batter women.

MYTH: Battery is a recent phenomenon.

FACT: Battery or domestic violence is not new. Wife battery has been condoned throughout history. In India, only in recent times has domestic violence become public. A *Times of India* report (24-11-99) cites a study by the International Centre for Research on Women that revealed 2/3 of women in the study experienced some form of violence, with sexual harassment widespread; over 40 per cent experiencing domestic violence and sexual assault. It also refers to a World Bank study showing that while estimating the cost of violence in terms of health burden, the Bank stated that rape and battery account for 5 per cent of the healthy years of life that are lost to women in the reproductive age group.

Another illustration is the prevalence of the crime in the West. The expression "rule of the thumb" comes from a 1767 English common law that permitted a husband to "chastise his wife

with a whip or rattan no wider than his thumb". In Canada, it was not until 1968, when the federal Divorce Act was passed, that physical and mental cruelty became grounds for divorce.

MYTH: All batterers are alike.

FACT: On the contrary! There are different types of batterers. According to Jacobson⁴ a study showed there are at least two distinguishable types that have practical consequences for battered women. These roughly correspond to the distinction between what the study called *Cobras* and the *Pit Bulls*. The former appear to be criminal types who have engaged in anti-social behaviour since adolescence. They beat their wives and abuse them emotionally, to stop them from interfering with the *Cobra's* need to get what they want, when they want it. Although they may apologise to their wives after beating them, and beg their forgiveness, such men are usually not sorry. Some of them are "psychopaths" which means they lack a conscience and are incapable of feeling remorse. But not all *Cobras* are psychopaths. Whether psychopathic or merely antisocial, they are incapable of forming truly intimate relationships with others, and to the extent that they marry, they do so on their terms. Their own family histories are often chaotic, with neither parent providing love or security, and they were often abused themselves as children.

Pit Bulls on the other hand are more likely to confine their violence to family members, especially their wives. Their fathers were likely to have battered their mothers, and they have learned that battering is an acceptable way to treat women. Unlike the *Cobras*, the *Pit Bulls* are emotionally dependent on their wives. What they fear most is abandonment.

MYTH: Battering is Never Caused by Drugs and Alcohol.

FACT: First and foremost, alcohol, etc., is not the cause of violence but it often makes it worse. Batterers often use alcohol as an excuse to avoid taking responsibility for violent behaviour. Battery, is also resorted to by non-alcohol consumers and teetotalers.

However, the relevant point here is that earlier studies, according to Jacobson⁴, did suggest a strong relationship between alcohol use and battering. But, there was at that time a great deal of ambiguity about the extent to which drug and alcohol abuse causes men who would otherwise not be batterers to beat their wives. Citing another study, Jacobson, shows that this

study on newlyweds indicated that alcohol use was one of the strongest indicators that men would be physically aggressive during the first year of marriage. Although the research on drug abuse has been less extensive, it is clear that batterers are a great deal more likely to be drug abusers than are men who do not batter.

Further, none of this research proves that alcohol or drugs "cause" battering. It simply suggests that batterers tend to have drug and alcohol problems. Because of this link, battered women who have not given up the dream often see treatment for drugs and alcohol abuse as their ray of hope: "If only he would stop drinking...everything would be fine". It is easy to understand how it is that battered women develop this belief. Indeed, it may be true that for some batterers, stopping the substance abuse will lead to an end to battering. However, the relationship between substance abuse and battering is an extremely complex and cannot be dealt with in such a publication.

Too much emphasis on drug and alcohol abuse distracts from the central issue: battering is fundamentally perpetuated by its success in controlling, intimidating, and subjugating the battered woman. The types of men who abuse their partners are also the types of men who abuse drugs and alcohol a habit that is part of the lifestyle of the batterer.

However, in rejecting alcohol and drug abuse as causal explanations for battering, many theorists in the field of domestic violence have thrown the baby with the bath water: in fact, some batterers *do* only batter while drunk *because* the state of intoxication transforms them.

As things currently stand, the substance abuse and domestic violence experts typically study one or the other but not both. And it is perfectly consistent to hold the position that drug and alcohol abuse can be one of many causes of battering on the one hand, and continue to hold the batterer responsible for the violence on the other hand.

MYTH: Batterers cannot control their violent tempers.

FACT: This is another complex issue, because there is a sense in which all behavior, even behaviour that is considered as voluntary, is actually caused by past and current events in and around our environment. People are all products of their own unique history, and that history helps to explain how they respond in particular situations.

But voluntary behaviour involves a choice, and depending on the outcome one seeks, different choices will be made. Battering is usually voluntary. There are some people with temporal lobe epilepsy whose brains literally trigger violent outbursts that bear no relationship to anything that is going on in the environment. There are some batterers (a small minority) whose battering rampages are truly impulsive and uncontrollable, at least in the early stages of each incident. But in the vast majority of cases, battering is choice in the same sense that all other voluntary actions are.

Citing psychological studies Jacobson⁴, refers to the "dissociation" often associated with violent episodes and a batterer (classified above as *Pit Bull*). He shows some anecdotal evidence that some of this type of batterers experience an altered state of consciousness during battering episodes. In extreme cases they do not even remember the episodes afterward. Although dissociative states are consistent with the interpretation that they are "out of control" when they batter, few of the batterers in his sample described their episodes of violence in a manner that suggest dissociation. They remembered the episodes but either minimised their significance or denied responsibility for them. Occasionally, they would deny that the violence had occurred. On the other hand Jacobson's interpretation of this denial is that these batters are lying, using another method of extending their control over their battered wives. The relationship between voluntarily lying and dissociation (truly not remembering) remains an unresolved issue, to be determined by future research. But in the vast majority of violent episodes that occurred among his sample, although the batters may have been behaving impulsively, they were not out of control.

MYTH: Battering Often Stops on Its Own.

FACT: It seldom does — on its own! Jacobson's⁴ research found that while many men decrease their level of violence over time, few of them stop completely. And when they do stop, the emotional abuse usually continues. This is an important finding as most research considers only physical abuse. But emotional abuse can be at least as effective a method of maintaining control, if the physical violence was once there. Once the batterer has achieved dominance through violence and the threat of more violence, emotional abuse often keeps the battered woman in a state of subjugation without the batterer having to use physical force. Since the violence

is used in order to obtain control, it is more convenient for the batterer to restrict himself to emotional abuse. That abuse reminds her that the danger of violence is ever-present, and this danger is often sufficient to retain control. Any intervention which defines success without taking emotional abuse into account will inflate its effectiveness. In Jacobson's sample, although many batterers *decreased* the frequency and severity of their violence over time, almost none of them stopped completely *and* also ended the emotional abuse.

Case Study: Frank stopped being violent for 18 months, and Jane, his wife, was quite happy about it. If Jacobson and his team had not also studied emotional abuse, they might have looked like a couple whose problems had been solved. But, if anything, they found that Frank was even more emotionally abusive two years later than he had been initially, despite ceasing the physical violence. He was more insulting, more verbally threatening, and humiliated Jane at every opportunity. It all served an additional function: they reminded Jane of the violence, and the tightrope she had to walk to avoid recurrences of that violence. These reminders were all she needed. Frank maintained his control without having to risk breaking the law. *Emotional abuse*, as destructive as it is, is not against the law!

MYTH: Psychotherapy is a More Effective "Treatment" for batterers than jail.

FACT: Prisons being overcrowded judges look for other ways when given discretion in sentencing. As psychotherapy is often recommended for batterers, judges often find some referrals for court-mandated treatment irresistible as alternatives to imprisonment, especially since domestic assault charges are often misdemeanors rather than felonies.

Ironically, what appears at first glance to be a good alternative to imprisonment is often a mistake. Jacobson points out that there is very little evidence that currently existing treatment programmes for batterers are effective, and much reasons to be concerned that in their present form, they are unlikely to stop the violence and even less likely to end the emotional abuse. Yet social workers among others believe in psychotherapy, and battered women are no exception. Therefore, when their husbands are "sentenced" to psychotherapy they may be lulled into a false sense of security, thus leading them to return home from a shelter falsely convinced they are now very safe.

Case Study: Roy had been to therapy once, and Helen received glowing reports from the anger-management therapist. Roy received 16 weeks of group therapy, and his therapist wrote the following during an evaluation at the conclusion of the course:

"In my professional opinion, Roy no longer constitutes a danger to his wife, Helen. He has been a model patient. He has accepted responsibility for being a batterer, has shown no inclination to repeat the violence from the past, and even stands a chance of qualifying for work as a therapist himself, working with batterers who have not yet developed the insight that has changed Roy's life".

Naturally, Helen was quite excited to make things work with the new Roy. But Roy's therapist had been fooled. And Roy's therapist had inadvertently misled Helen. Less than two months after the group treatment had ended, Roy came at Helen with a knife, nearly killing her.

Violent criminals who assault strangers are seldom offered psychotherapy as an alternative to prison, in contrast to perpetrators of wife battering. What does this information convey about the judicial system and how it views "family violence"? Family violence is still regarded as less serious than violence against strangers, even though most women who are murdered are not killed by strangers but by boyfriends, husbands, ex-husbands and ex-boyfriends but accountability is a prerequisite to decreased violence

Jacobson believes that referrals to psychotherapy, in the absence of legal sanctions, send the wrong signals to batterers: they have got away with a violent crime with nothing but a minor punishment. An excellent illustration of this is the O.J. Simpson trial in the US. In 1989, he pleaded "no contest" to the charge of misdemeanor assault, after beating his wife. He received a small fine and was ordered to seek treatment. The treatment ended up being nothing more than a few sessions, some of which were conducted by phone. The same applies to the former world heavyweight boxer, Mike Tyson. Americans today know just how ineffective this "punishment" and the treatment that was required of him were. There should not be any illusions on the rehabilitative power of prison, but at least it stops the violence temporarily and gives the battered woman time to make plans. It also sends a powerful signal to the batterer.

Consider also the ability of the most violent batterers to hoodwink judges, police, social workers and therapists. The *Cobra* type (see above) will figure out what the therapist wants him to say, sound contrite, be counted as a success, and yet all that has been accomplished is that the system has been exploited by him.

MYTH: Battered women can easily leave their violent partners if they so desired but why don't they?

FACT: The question itself is flawed. It deflects attention from the real question: "Why does he beat her"? Or, "Why doesn't he go?"

Battered women do not remain in the relationship because they enjoy the battering. They may feel trapped and unable to leave or the battering had made her lose all her self-esteem. Battering often increases at their point of separation, and battered women may actually feel safer staying. If they have children, they may feel that they will not be able to support themselves and their children if they leave. People whom they turn to for support — friends, family, neighbours, police, among others — may be uninformed about the battering and may not take the situation seriously. They may know about the existence of shelters or women's groups for battered women but they may feel that moving to shelter in a new area or city will lead to a great deal of dislocation for themselves or for their children (who will have to change schools while they take shelter). While they have been living with abuse for a long time they may be so worn down and shattered emotionally that they simply cannot imagine a better option. Or she harbours hopes of their relationship will improve.

At a deeper level, this myth actually assumes a fact that most battered women do stay in abusive relationship. But they are not to be blamed for staying. In the West, they do leave at high rates. In India, however, battered women lack such an easy option. Indian women choose to stay in an abusive relationship for a number of reasons: for religious or cultural beliefs; the impression that it is her "duty" to keep the marriage and family together, no matter to what it costs her; guilt about leaving her children with the abusive father;

At any rate, the wife's leaving is often an act of courage because it means having to cope with enormous fear as well as financial insecurity. Further, after being subjected to physical and emotional abuse for a period of time, women are systematically stripped of their self-esteem,

to the point where they falsely believe that they need their husbands in order to survive, despite the violence. This lowering of self-esteem is often part of a constellation of symptoms that are common to survivors of trauma. Such women suffer trauma similar to that of soldiers in combat, abused children, and rape victims (many battered women are also raped by their husbands). These symptoms include depression, anxiety, and a sense of being detached from their bodies and numb to the physical world, nightmares, and flashbacks of violent episodes. The syndrome characterised by these symptoms is known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)⁴.

Consequently, their parenting abilities get affected, their problem-solving abilities are impaired, and their ability to plan for the future is disrupted. Given this common experience of trauma, it is amazing that battered women manage to be as resourceful and resilient as they are, especially since their lives and the lives of their children are often at risk. The corrosive and cumulative effects of battering go a long way toward explaining how hard it is to get out of an abusive relationship

The fact that those wives who have not yet left does not mean that there is something wrong or odd about them. The point is that it is easier to get into an abusive relationship than it is to get out of one.

MYTH: *As the head of the family a man can do whatever he wants to his wife as she deserves such treatment.*

FACT: No man has the right to beat a woman or even his wife or partner. Nothing a woman does gives a man the right to beat her, even if he thinks she deserves it - even if she herself thinks she deserves it.

No woman ever deserves battery. Assaulted women report a wide range of incidents that trigger violence. The study by the International Centre for Research on Women in Gujarat, for instance, (mentioned above), noted that 50 per cent of women were abused for not preparing the meals correctly; 48 per cent were abused for not taking proper care of the children; 8 per cent for their inability to manage the home, and 1 per cent for bringing in inadequate dowry.

MYTH: *Only poor ignorant and mad or demented men beat their wives or partners.*

FACT: Violence is not merely a problem of poverty or ignorance. Violence can and these days often does take place in the home; rich or

poor, educated or less educated, in urban or in rural areas. However, violence in more affluent groups is often hidden because these women use shelters, legal aid, and other social services less often.

Moreover, wife battery being so widespread it cannot all be owing to men being mentally unsound or deranged. Studies show that most men who batter their wives or partners are very non-violent outside their homes. They rarely are abusive to their colleagues or employers! When abusive men batter their partners they are careful to do so in a manner that physical injuries usually do not show. If abusive men were really mentally ill they could not limit their violence in this way.

MYTH: *It is wrong to interfere with the private affairs of a couple. It is their concern and nobody else's business.*

FACT: Violence in the home is not just a family matter. Many women are grievously hurt or even killed. Violence is a social and community health issue.

Above all, sexuality in India, ironically, has been made a public matter - through an archaic law, viz., Section 377 of the IPC, which outlaws so-called unnatural offences. It states "whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man; woman or animal shall be punished with life imprisonment". This Section legally sanctions the public disgust and hatred of homosexuals. Thus, the law makes citizens criminals subject to life imprisonment.

This law affects a whole gamut of civil and criminal laws that deny gays and lesbians the right that heterosexuals take for granted. And this myth claims that the sexuality of Indians is a private affair!!

MYTH: *Both Men and Women Batter.*

FACT: This is a backlash against the campaign on behalf of battered women. There are even those who claim that a big underground movement of battered husbands e.g. in Mumbai refuse to tell their stories because they are (supposedly) reluctant to be identified as "weaklings".

To support these claims, there are reports⁴ that cite statistics from surveys that the frequency of violent acts is about the same in men and women. However, these statistics conveniently overlook two important points on this issue: a) the impact of the violence and its function. Citing statistics by a research centre in New

York, Jacobson, states that male violence 'does much more damage than female violence: women are much more likely to be injured, more likely to enter the hospital after being assaulted by their partner, and much more likely to be in need of medical care. Wives are much more likely to be killed by their husbands than the reverse; in fact, women in general are more likely to be killed by their male partners than by all other types of perpetrators combined, b) Because men are generally physically stronger than women, and because they are often socialised to use violence as a method of control, it is hard to find women who are even *capable* of battering their husbands. However, battering is not just physical aggression: it is physical aggressing with a purpose. Battering often involves injury, and in Jacobson's sample, it was usually accompanied by fear on the part of the victim. Fear is the force that proves battering with its power. Injuries help sustain the fear. The vast majority of physical assaults are shoves, and other relatively minor acts of violence including eve teasing.

All indications are that in heterosexual relationships, battering is primarily something that men do to women, rather than the reverse. However, there are cases of battered women who are violent, mostly, but not always, in self-defense. Battered women are living in a culture of violence, and they are part and parcel of that culture. Some battered women defend themselves: they hit back, and might even hit or push as often as their husbands do. But they are the ones who are beaten up. On a survey that simply totals the frequency of violent acts, they might look equally violent. But there is no question that in most relationships the man is the batterer, and the woman is the one who is being battered.

MYTH: Women often provoke men into battering them.

FACT: This myth has the support of even some mainstream professionals, like family therapists, among others.

However, it is men who initiate violence independently of what their wives do or say. Among certain therapists it is not surprising to hear the "advice": If you would stop using that language, perhaps your husband would not get so upset or out of control". Husbands wear this comment like a badge of honour and even refer to their wife's swear words as "violence". In the husband's view, she started the violence whenever she swore at him. Some therapists

appear to support this view. In such situations, the wife never felt understood by the therapist, but the outcome of the treatment was that she blamed herself for the battering and thought that the solution was "to be a better wife".

Even if the husband's violence is a response to remarks made by the wife, it is an error to think of these remarks as "provocations". Provocation implies that "she got what she deserved". Husbands believe they are justified in beating their wives because she had an "attitude" about him being late from work. Batterers make choices when they beat their wives. There is no remark or behaviour that justifies a violent response unless it is in self-defence.

There is a philosophy of marriage inherent in patriarchy that women provoke men to be violent. It maintains that the man is the head of the family, the boss. Their authority is divinely revealed and thus they are justified in beating their wives. In more recent times it means viewing the wife as someone who deserve to be beaten under certain conditions.

Wives never deserve to be beaten by their husbands. Battering is a criminal act, and verbal challenges from the wife do not constitute mitigating circumstances.

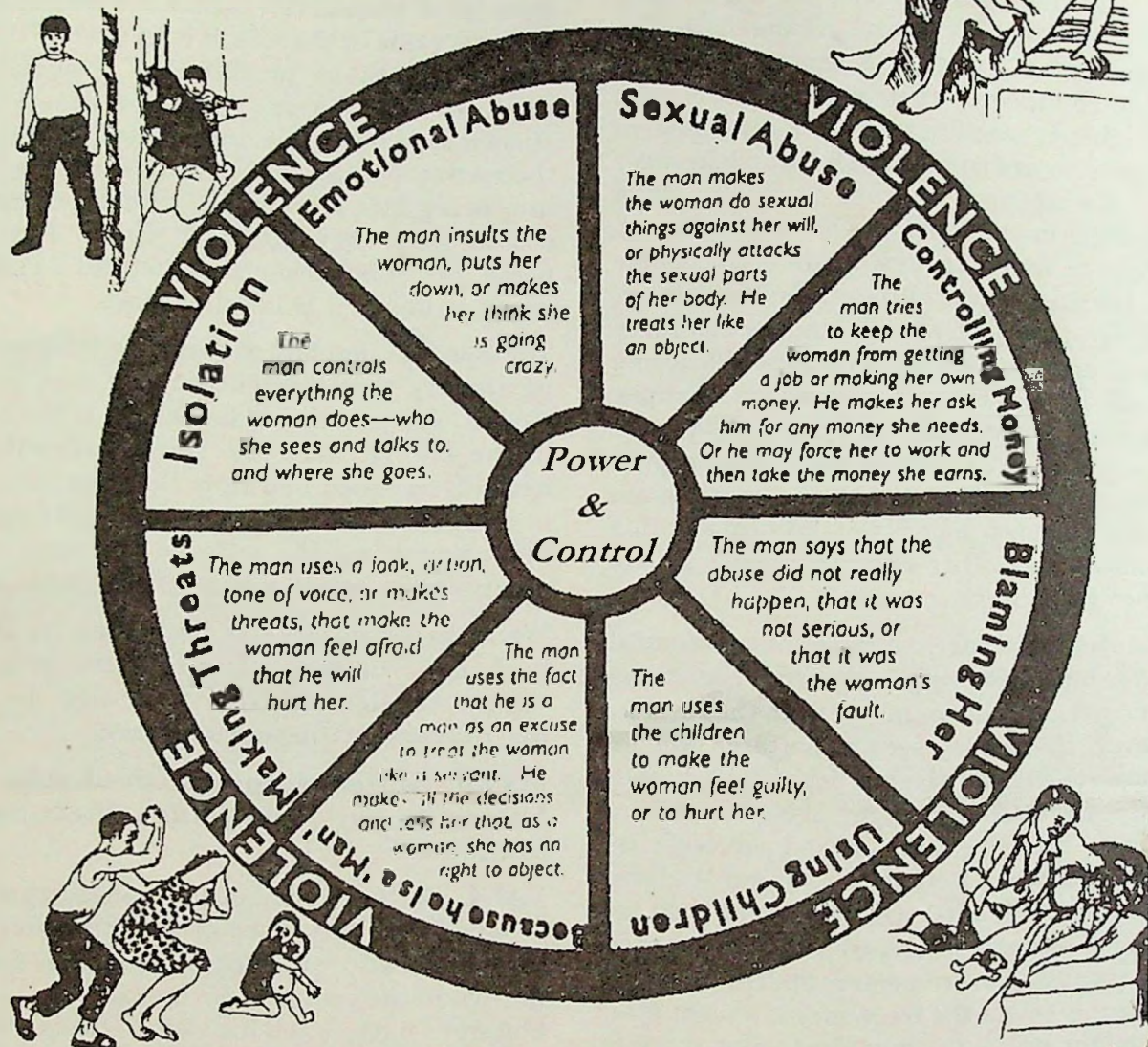
MYTH: Battered women could stop the battering by changing their own behaviour.

FACT: Battering cannot be changed through actions on the part of the victim. Battering has little to do with what the women do or do not do, what they say or do not say. It is the batterer's duty — and his alone — to stop being abusive. There were no triggers of the violence on the part of the men, or were there any switches available for turning off once it got started.

REFERENCES

1. Poonachaa, V., Coping with Domestic Violence, *One India, One People*, September, Mumbai 1999.
2. Nimbalkar, Mrs. S.W., Violence Against Dalit Women, *Roshni*, New Delhi.
3. Kelkar, G., Violence Against Women, *Indian Institute of Advanced Studies*, Shimla, 1992.
4. Jacobson, N., Gottman, J., Breaking the Cycle: New Insights into Violent Relationships, Bloomsbury, London, 1998.

GENDER VIOLENCE



Source: *Women Have No Doctor*, 1997.

Facts Against Myths is a monthly bulletin of factual information on a number of development myths and fallacies, etc, including information against alien development models, paradigms and false concepts on caste, creed and gender.



Produced and Published by :
Vikas Adhyayan Kendra
 D-1 Shivdham, 62 Link Road,
 Malad West, Mumbai 400 064, INDIA

☎ : 882 2850 & 889 8662 Fax : 889 8941
 Email : vak@bom3.vsnl.net.in

Design & Layout : Kartiki Desai

Printed by : **Omega Offset**, 2/3, Emerald Corner,
 Maratha Colony, Tilakwadi, Belgaum 590 006.

PRINTED MATTER

BOOK - POST