

Family Violence/IPA and the Family Systems Therapist

Important Myths for Family Therapists to Acknowledge

Myth 1

- * **MYTH:** When there is violence in the family, all members of the family are participating in the dynamic, and therefore, all must change for the violence to stop.
- * **FACT:** Only the batterer has the ability to stop the violence. Battering is a behavioral choice for which the batterer must be held accountable. Many battered women make numerous attempts to change their behavior in the hope that this will stop the abuse. This does not work. Changes in family members' behavior will not cause the batterer to be non-violent.

Myth 2

- * **MYTH:** The real problem is couples who assault each other. Women are just as violent as men.
- * **FACT:** Dr. Murray Strauss study at University of New Hampshire found that women use violent means to resolve conflict in relationships as often as men. However, the study also concluded that when the context and consequences of an assault are measured, the majority of victims are women. The U.S. Dept. of Justice has found that 85% of the victims of spouse abuse are female. Men can be victims, but it is rare.

Myth 3

- * **MYTH:** Men who batter are often good fathers and should have joint custody of their children should the couple separate.
- * **FACT:** Studies have found that men who batter their wives also abuse their children in 70% of cases. Even when children are not directly abused, they suffer as a result of witnessing one parent assault another. Batterers often display an increased interest in their children at the time of separation, as a means of maintaining contact with, and thus control over, partners.

Myth 4

- * **MYTH:** Domestic violence is usually a one time, isolated occurrence.
- * **FACT:** Battering is a pattern of coercion and control that one person exerts over another. Battering is not just one physical attack. It includes the repeated use of a number of tactics, including intimidation, threats, economic deprivation, isolation and psychological and sexual abuse. Physical violence is just one of these tactics. The various forms of abuse utilized by batterers help to maintain power and control over their spouses and partners.

Myth 5

- * **MYTH:** Domestic violence is often triggered by stress, for example, the loss of a job or some financial or marital problem.
- * **FACT:** Violence is a specific learned and chosen response to stress, whether real or imagined. Certainly, high general levels of domestic violence can be related to social problems such as unemployment, however, other reactions to such situations are equally possible. Some people take out their frustrations on themselves with drugs or alcohol, some take it out on others with verbal or physical abuse.

References

- * **Domestic Violence Myths, Clark County Prosecuting Attorney,**
[http://www.clarkprosecutor.org/html/domviol/myths.
htm](http://www.clarkprosecutor.org/html/domviol/myths.htm)

Question

- * Why is conjoint family therapy counter-indicated in the first phase of treatment for a violent family?

Barbara's Story

- * “Stories of everyday people ending violence” from the Storytelling & Organizing Project, Creative Interventions, Oakland CA