



## Are These Our Neighbours?

People who are caught in situations of domestic violence.

*“Must be...not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome and not a lover of money”  
1 Timothy 3.3.*

### Background

The problem is obvious from the topic title. How the problem has developed to the stage it is in modern society needs some historical explanation.

Domestic violence arises from an attitude among the strong towards the weak holding them as inferiors to be used at will. This attitude towards weaker people and groups has been with us from earliest times and in all cultures.

In some families this attitude is seen as normal and is passed from generation to generation. Under these conditions both oppressors and victims likely accept this view of normalcy and submit to its tragic results.

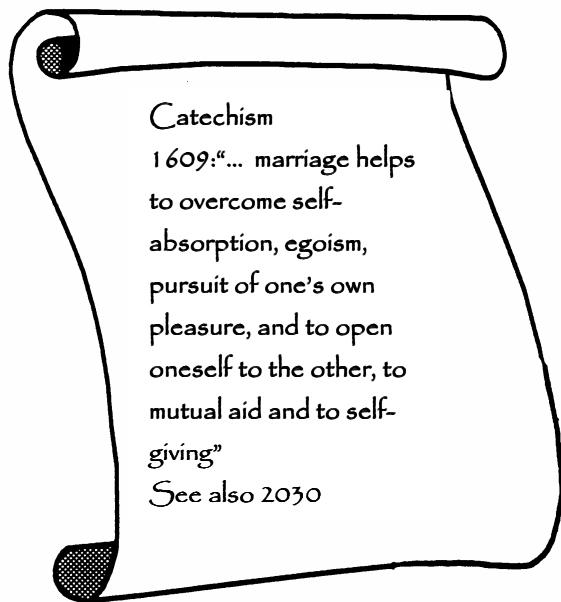
Another attitudinal factor has been the patriarchal view that a man is the head of his family with responsibility, among other things, for its behaviour. This in turn gave him the right and the duty to maintain discipline within his family unit. Corporal punishment of women and children was regarded as legitimate.

**Definition** Domestic violence refers to anti social and harmful actions taking place within a household, including men, women and children.

### Problem

- Unfortunately power corrupts and this imperfect ideal of a well behaved family has often degenerated further into the abuse of social and physical power. All this is for the benefit of the oppressor, more often male, who may inflict violence for his own psychological relief or amusement.
- Today other factors beyond paternalistic thinking have emerged.
- These include loss of a job, despair or helplessness, or other pressures. These difficulties when combined with alcohol or drugs, may cause normally non violent men to become abusive or may increase the level of violence in those already addicted to the misuse of their strength.
- First Nations people have additional difficulties as a result of being torn from their family settings when placed in residential schools without parental role models or a view of a good family life.
- For many generations people believed domestic violence was a problem of the under class. The acceptance of divorce and changing social attitudes towards violence has altered this perception.
- Media has been accused of changing perceptions. Examples are increased reporting of incidents, the visual media content of violent destruction of life and property, and the lyrics of singers popular with youth.
- Although corporal punishment has been severely restricted in the schools, attacks in the home are not easily detected or controlled. Women and children can now find refuge and eventually divorce or annulment. Also women can in these situations provide at least minimum support for themselves and their children.
- Just as much as there have been increased reports of domestic violence these days, so too means of escape from abusive situations have increased.
- These improvements are not however solutions. The only permanent solutions to domestic violence lie in changing attitudes among both attackers and victims from that of owner and chattel to one of human respect, and love.





***“Violence always provokes violence and irresistibly engenders new forms of oppression and enslavement ”***

***Paul VI***

***“In a cultural and social context in which it is considered normal that men are able to, and even should, act abusively towards women, we should consider it as a true form of relations of slavery.”***

***Engendering Jubilee***

### References

See also the backgrounder People involved in abuse situations.

Guadium et Spes The Church in the Modern World Second Vatican Council 1962 para 47

Centismus Annus John Paul II 1991 para 40

Transforming Abuse, K. Louise Schmidt (New Society Publishes, 1993)

When Mommy Gets Hurt, Ilene Lee and Kathy Sylvester (Kidsrights, 1996)

### Speakers and Connections

Birthright

Alcoholics Anonymous and other 12 step programs.

Community Mediation Services.

Saskatoon Crisis Centre. Interval House.

School Parent Councils are good places to invite resource personnel for giving background.

Family to Family ties.



### Discussions

1. What are other interpretations of marriage are there and what is your response when they are placed in the public forum?
2. What sacrifices were expected of the partners in a marriage years ago as compared to today?
3. To what extent is the economic factor part of the cause of domestic violence?
4. Who is your neighbour in today's world? What are the responsibilities of neighbours?
5. To what extent can we rely on the pronouncements of various church leaders in dealing with the many strains being placed upon a family, especially those living in near poverty?
6. In what ways has the concept "I am my brother's or sister's keeper" no meaning in today's society?
7. What does it mean to be a good neighbour in today's world?
8. What can we do to encourage respect for the physically, mentally and economically weaker among us?

### Actions

1. Take a positive and optimistic attitude to all the negative reporting in the media that wants to state that marriage is out of date.
2. Be ready to offer quiet support to people known to you who may be in violent domestic situations, preferably by referring to agencies.
3. Take the opportunity to support your faith community in both marriage preparation and enrichment courses.