Intimate Partner Violence

More than 4 million women each year in the United States are physically harmed by their husband, boyfriend, or other intimate partner. **Domestic violence**, also known as intimate partner violence, not only hurts the women who are abused but also affects their overall health, their ability to earn a living, and their children. Although men can suffer from domestic violence, women are much more likely to be abused by an intimate partner than are men. The August 4, 2010, issue of *JAMA* is a theme issue on violence and human rights that includes several articles about intimate partner violence. This Patient Page is based on one previously published in the August 13, 2008, issue of *JAMA*.

SIGNS OF ABUSE IN A RELATIONSHIP

Domestic violence may include having your partner beat, slap, kick, or punch you. Such violence can cause severe injuries and may even be deadly. In addition to physical violence, verbal abuse and psychological aggression, such as screaming and yelling, can include angry words that make you feel ashamed or insignificant. Emotional abuse and sexual abuse, including rape by an intimate partner, can also occur. Alcohol and drug abuse make the pattern of violence worse. Individuals who are dependent on substances are more likely to commit acts of violence against their partners.

Women who have been abused may develop sleep disturbances, sexual dysfunction, depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder, eating disorders, and malnutrition, and they may attempt suicide.

HOW TO FIND HELP

Doctors, nurses, and other health care professionals care about your health and may ask you questions about violence in your home or in a relationship. If you have been abused, your doctor or health care professional can assist you in finding help and safety from your abuser. Some women may be afraid to say they have been abused, but the longer a woman stays in an abusive relationship, the more danger she and her children may be in. Abusive behavior often becomes worse over time.

IN THE UNITED STATES, IF YOU ARE BEING ABUSED, CALL THE NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE AT 1-800-799-SAFE (7233). THEY CAN HELP YOU MAKE A SAFETY PLAN OR REFER YOU FOR HELP IN YOUR AREA.

Sources: American Bar Association, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, American Medical Women's Association

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
  www.acog.org
- National Library of Medicine
  www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/domesticviolence.html
- American Bar Association
  www.abanet.org/domviol/home.html

INFORM YOURSELF

To find this and previous JAMA Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page link on *JAMA*'s Web site at www.jama.com. Many are available in English and Spanish. A Patient Page on posttraumatic stress disorder was published in the August 1, 2007, issue and one on elder abuse in the August 5, 2009, issue.

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