

# 2. Dynamics of abuse

## Training topics

- A. Indicators of domestic abuse
- B. Patterns of violence
- C. Dynamics observed in domestic abuse situations
- D. Batterers
- E. Culture and the dynamics of abuse
- F. Substance abuse and domestic abuse
- G. Mental health issues

## Participant handouts

Power and control wheel  
Intergenerational transmission of violence  
Dynamics of domestic abuse  
Reasons for staying  
Characteristics of batterers  
Continuum of family violence  
Perpetrator treatment  
In my culture...  
In a culture I've observed...  
Intersection of substance abuse and domestic abuse  
Effects of substance abuse on perpetrators and victims of domestic abuse  
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

## Trainer overheads

Power and control  
Intergenerational transmission of violence  
Continuum of family violence  
Dynamics of domestic abuse  
Culture affects how we  
Look for  
Diagnostic criteria for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

# A. Indicators of domestic abuse

## Review and discuss handout

Review overhead and handout titled "Power and control wheel." Discuss the range of behavioral manifestations, including

- **Physical force:** hitting, slapping, kicking, pushing, shoving, hair pulling, biting, spitting, violence against the self.
- **Sexual abuse:** rape, coerced sexual activities, inappropriate touching or gestures, forced participation in pornography.
- **Use of intimidation:** inducing fear by using negative looks, actions, gestures, breaking objects, destroying personal effects, displaying weapons, stalking, hurting pets.
- **Emotional abuse:** put downs, name calling, playing mind games, humiliation, guilt tripping, telling someone "you're crazy."
- **Use of isolation:** monitoring or supervising what a person does, who a person sees or talks to, where a person goes, limiting out-of-home involvement, using jealousy to justify restrictions, any deprivations.
- **Minimizing, denial, blame:** downplaying any accusations of abuse or hurt, not taking concerns seriously, shifting responsibility, saying victim caused or deserved the abuse.
- **Use of children:** threatening to take away the children, encouraging children to disobey or disrespect the victim, alienating children.
- **Using "dominant" privilege:** treating victim like a servant, making all major decisions, acting like the "master of the house," defining the rules and roles.
- **Use of money:** taking victim's earnings, controlling all money, preventing victim from getting or keeping a job, giving victim an allowance, keeping all information about money hidden, making victim "beg" for money.
- **Use of coercion and threats:** making threats of all types, including suicide.

It is important for staff to be aware that abuse takes many forms beyond physical and sexual abuse.

## B. Patterns of violence

### Presentation

The psychologist Lenore Walker discovered a pattern in many violent relationships. This pattern could play out in a single day or over a longer period of time. While there is considerable variation in abusive relationships, many fall into this pattern.

**Tension building phase:** Everyday issues like work, child rearing or money lead to tension and threats, verbal abuse or intimidation. The victim tries to temper the abuse and please the abuser but tension increases and physical abuse begins.

**Acute battering phase:** The abuser, no longer able to control his or her emotions or upset by an external event, begins physical violence. Abuse is triggered by the abuser's emotional state or reaction to events, not usually by the victim's behavior.

**Contrition or reparation phase occurs in some relationships:** Also called the "honeymoon" phase, this is when the batterer tries to make amends for abuse. Behavior can include shame, remorse, apologies and helpfulness—as well as trying to minimize the abuse or even blaming it on the victim. The batterer promises to never again resort to physical abuse. The reconciliation can strengthen the relationship for a time. Importantly, it can convince the victim to stay rather than leave.

### Review and discuss handout

Review overhead and handout "Intergenerational transmission of violence." One long-lasting effect of domestic abuse is that children learn its acceptability and effectiveness. This handout shows one conceptualization of how that process takes place.

### Activity

Ask participants to work in small groups with the two previous handouts to answer the question "How does this fit with your experience or understanding?" Ask them to think about situations they've observed with their clients or acquaintances. Ask for a few comments and any questions. Reinforce the following learning points:

- the pattern of abuse is intermittent and becomes worse over time
- decreasing domestic violence in society at large means affecting a "transitional generation" in families
- social services staff have an important role in helping clients and families seek help in breaking cycles of violence

## **C. Dynamics observed in domestic abuse situations**

### **Review and discuss handout**

In addition to specific behaviors that will produce the desired effects of control and power for the perpetrator, additional dynamics within the relationship can be observed. Refer to overhead and handout titled "Dynamics of domestic abuse situations." Review with the class the five points listed and discuss the following:

#### **1. Domestic abuse is a learned behavior**

People are not born perpetrators of abuse. Individuals who engage in domestic abuse have acquired that behavior over time through their observation and reinforcement of such behaviors. These behaviors and the beliefs that support them are learned at times in the family setting. The behaviors are then reinforced by the perpetrator's experiences, such as not being penalized or held responsible for the behaviors. Additionally, in many cultures, social institutions will overtly reinforce violence as a legitimate means of control in that society, including the family unit. Perpetrators repeat these practices because they work to achieve the victim's compliance. When the victim does comply, even temporarily, the power and control beliefs of the perpetrator are reinforced. The perpetrator is able to justify these actions because of reinforcement from the observable results of actions and from the social institutions in the culture.

#### **2. Domestic abuse typically involves repetitive behaviors and may include different types of abuse or changes in tactics to gain control.**

People who need a pattern of control and power may use a variety of methods to achieve this goal. The methods used may be due to differences in their personalities, the conduct of their intimate partner or the particular idiosyncrasies of the relationship. Perpetrator tactics may escalate, stabilize or decrease depending upon what is the most effective at the time for gaining or maintaining control.

#### **3. Domestic abuse is the responsibility of the perpetrator. It is not caused by any other source.**

Domestic abuse is not caused by heredity, illness, genetics, alcohol or drugs, anger, stress, the victim's behavior, the relationship or any other reason. The intrapsychic dynamics of the perpetrator are complex and cannot be simply reduced to one specific reason or cause. It is important that each individual takes ownership and responsibility for his or her own unique belief system and behavioral choices.

**4. Perpetrators and victims of domestic abuse are found in all groups of people irrespective of age, race, socioeconomics, educational level, occupation and religious or sexual preferences.**

Domestic abuse relationships are heterogeneous and do not fit into any one group or profile. Studies examining the prevalence rates of domestic violence rates in specific demographic categories have been inconclusive.

**5. The victim's behaviors are often a strategy for survival.**

Since victims quickly learn that they cannot stop the perpetrator, they find many different strategies to resist or cope with the abuse or to keep themselves (and children) alive. These actions have been labeled as "codependent" or inappropriate. However, the victim's responses may be reactions or decisions on how to survive very frightening and dangerous situations.

## **Review and discuss handout**

Followup the previous point by reviewing the handout "Reasons for staying." Highlight items two and three—economic dependence and no one to talk to—which point to the importance of CalWORKs and staff in dealing with domestic abuse. With the aid of CalWORKs and empathetic workers, victims can begin taking steps to remove themselves from abusive situations.

## **D. Batterers**

### **Review and discuss handout**

As previously discussed, batterers come from every demographic group. Research, though, has found some commonalities across ethnic groups, age, income and education. Review handout "Characteristics of batterers," noting the following points:

- Some male batterers have been over-socialized in a traditional male sex role and confuse violence with masculinity.
- Many batterers learned to be abusers as children by witnessing abuse of their mothers or experiencing abuse themselves.
- Many batterers have mental health problems in additions to their violent behavior.

## Review and discuss handout

Sometimes it is useful to think of domestic abuse as occurring on a continuum. Not all abusive interpersonal relationships become increasingly violent. Some batterers are able to stop their aggression but some do not stop. Review handout and overhead "Continuum of domestic abuse." Amplify on the following learning points:

- **Separation doesn't necessarily end violence:** Many people assume separation will end abuse, but it can actually increase the risk of lethal violence. The risk of homicide is higher in the first two months after separation and continues for up to two years.
- **Prediction of homicide is not yet possible:** A batterer's violent behavior alone is not a predictor of risk. Risk assessment instruments are not yet reliable predictors of lethality. However, when violence occurs during separation, it typically includes the types of violence used during the relationship as well as new forms of violence arising from separation. The latter can include battles over finances, custody and visitation. Attempted or threatened child kidnapping and stalking the victim can occur after separation.
- **Batterers in same-sex relationships use the same power and control tactics as heterosexual batterers:** They blame the victim, deny or minimize abuse and resist being accountable for their violence.

## Review and discuss handout

Some perpetrators of domestic abuse will voluntarily seek treatment. Most, however, will enter treatment only as the result of a court order. Review the handout "Perpetrator treatment."

# E. Culture and the dynamics of abuse

## Presentation and activity

Culture is a broad concept. It encompasses not only our families of origin and ethnicity but also our life choices regarding where we live and work and who we partner with.

Acknowledge that participants likely know from their training and experience on the job that understanding the cultural context of a client is a key to effective interactions and interventions. It is important to explore with clients whether and how their culture impacts their experience with abuse.

Project the overhead "Culture affects how we" and point out that culture affects our values, thoughts, emotions and behaviors—and the values, thoughts, emotions and behaviors of clients.

We've learned so far that batterers use various forms of power and control. These can include:

**dominance**—in making decisions and treating the victim like a servant  
**isolation**—controlling who the victim sees and what he or she does  
**control**—of money and other resources

Culture plays a role in how power and control are expressed.

Turn to the handout "In my culture...". Ask participants to write down two or three words or phrases that describe their own culture. Ask them to take a few minutes to think about their own culture and take notes on role expectations and power relations.

Now ask participants to turn to the handout "In a culture I've observed...". Ask them to think of someone they know from another culture—a friend, neighbor, coworker or client. Describe the culture in a few words or phrases and work alone to make some notes on what they know about role expectations and power relations in that culture.

Project the overhead "Look for." Ask participants to work in small groups to discuss the similarities and differences they noticed among cultures and between cultures. Ask for volunteers to share some examples from their groups. Point out that the variations they discovered are a reminder of why we need to guard against stereotyping in work with clients.

## F. Substance use and domestic abuse

### Review and discuss handout

Review handout "Intersection of substance abuse and domestic abuse."

Research indicates that alcohol and drug use does not directly cause the domestic abuse. Some people are abusive whether or not they consume substances. And other people use substances and never abuse an intimate partner. However, alcohol and drugs lower inhibitions and impair cognitive functioning, which includes logic and judgement. This could lead to behaving in inappropriate ways or to lowering the threshold for abuse in individuals who may be predisposed to aggressiveness. The National Crime Victimization Survey found that among victims able to describe alcohol or drug use by the perpetrator, 75 percent reported use at the time of an incident. Some

drugs—such as cocaine, crack, amphetamines, PCP, or steroids—can induce high levels of irritability, hostility, paranoia, rage episodes, or at worst, induce psychosis, any of which may contribute to domestic abuse. In substance abuse situations, interventions for the addiction is not sufficient to stop the domestic abuse. Use or addiction to substances has also been correlated with increased lethality of the perpetrator.

## Activity

Ask participants read the handout "Effects of substance abuse on perpetrators and victims of substance abuse" and circle two pieces of information that are either surprising or new. Turn to another participant and share that information.

## G. Mental health issues

### Review and discuss handout

Project the overhead "Diagnostic criteria for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder" and refer participants to handout "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder."

Consequences of domestic abuse for the victim are immediate and often long term. The cycle of domestic abuse creates an extraordinary stressor for the victim and is considered to be significantly distressing or traumatic. Symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder may develop. Often victims may try to hide symptoms as their energies are expended in attempts to survive the abuse in the moment. The victim may also experience shame, guilt or feeling abnormal when symptoms do manifest. Some victims may become immobilized as a result of the post-traumatic stress symptoms and become unable to take the necessary actions to improve or change their lives. The manifestations of these symptoms may compromise the victim's ability to follow through on the tasks of a CalWORKs program.

State the following implications of mental health issues for CalWORKs:

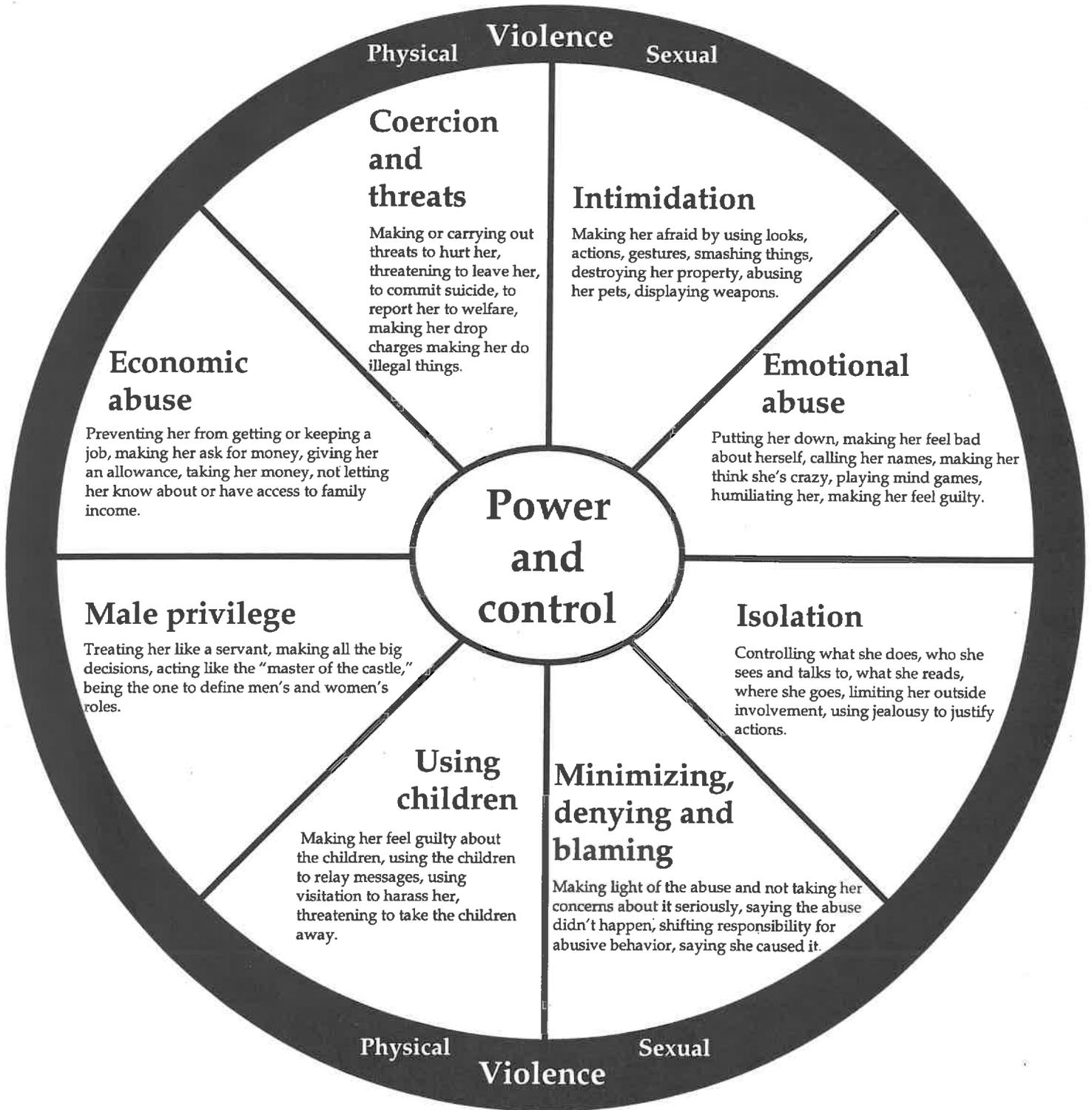
- Longer-term consequences include moderate to severe depression, anxiety disorders, developing a sense of helplessness or hopelessness, chronic passivity, and interactional styles of manipulation, dependency or deception. These mental health issues may produce symptoms that become obstacles to participating in CalWORKs unless dealt with.
- Domestic abuse in general creates a devaluation of the self. Over time, the victim feels more negative about the self and more incapable of fending off the abuse. As a result the victim's self-esteem, self-image and self-confidence are affected. These

beliefs about the self can generalize to all aspects of the victim's life, including their efforts at CalWORKs task completion. The CalWORKs client who has suffered from domestic abuse may lack self-confidence or self-motivation to successfully follow through on a CalWORKs plan.

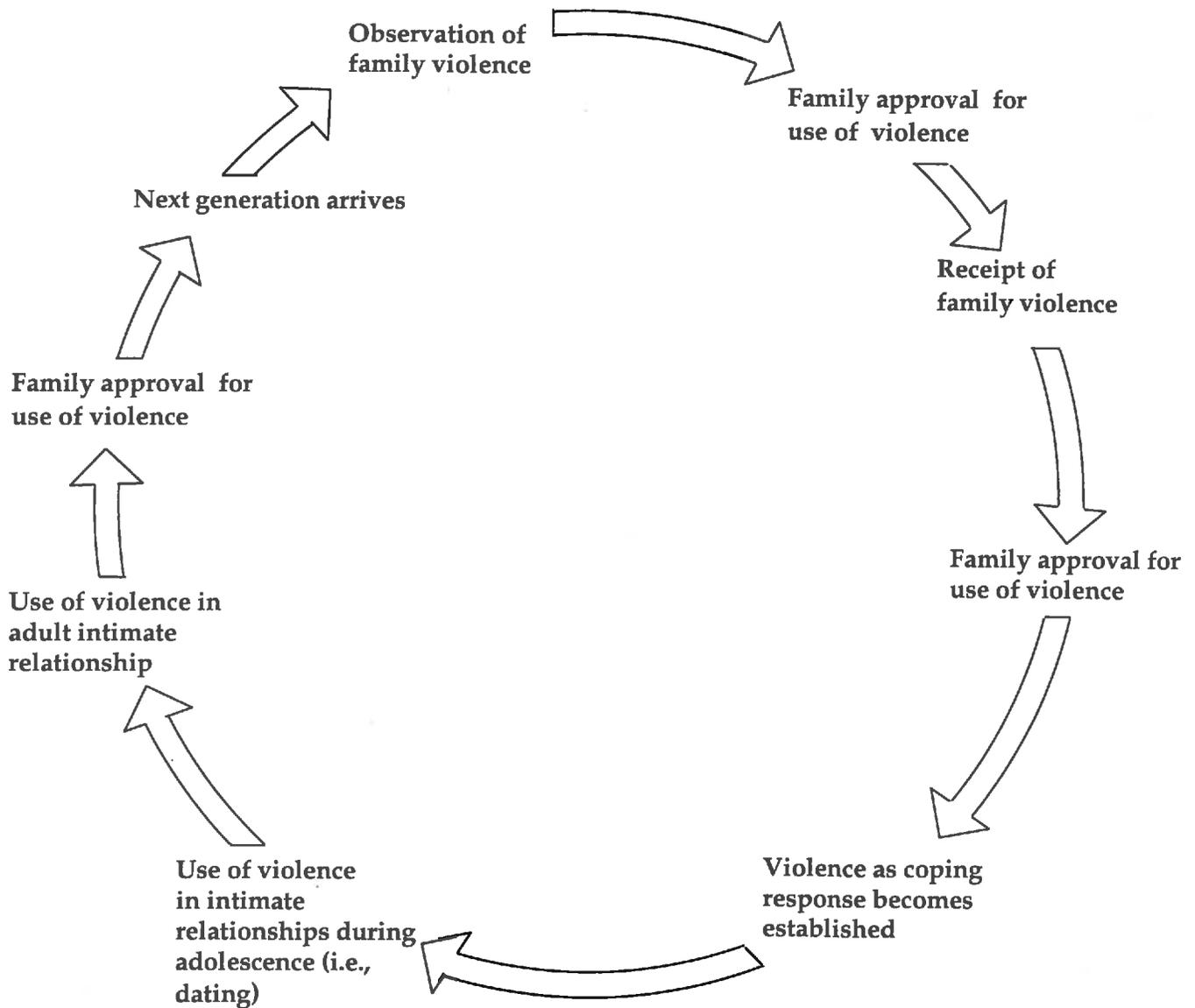
- Furthermore, intermittent or routine domestic crisis may disrupt the client's ability to maintain focus and commitment to CalWORKs activities.
- When the client does leave the abuser, further disruption of routine occurs as a result of relocation, involvement in re-establishing one's life, and the added burdens of severing the relationship.
- For some clients, leaving the abuser may heighten the risk of the perpetrator stalking or becoming lethal toward the victim. In such instances, referrals to mental health, legal services and shelters are essential.

# **Participant Handouts**

# Power and control wheel



# Intergenerational transmission of violence



# **Dynamics of domestic abuse**

- **Domestic abuse is a learned behavior.**
- **Domestic abuse typically involves repetitive behaviors.**
- **Domestic abuse is the responsibility of the perpetrator.**
- **Perpetrators and victims of abuse are found in all groups of people.**
- **The victim's behaviors are a strategy for self-survival.**

# Reasons for staying

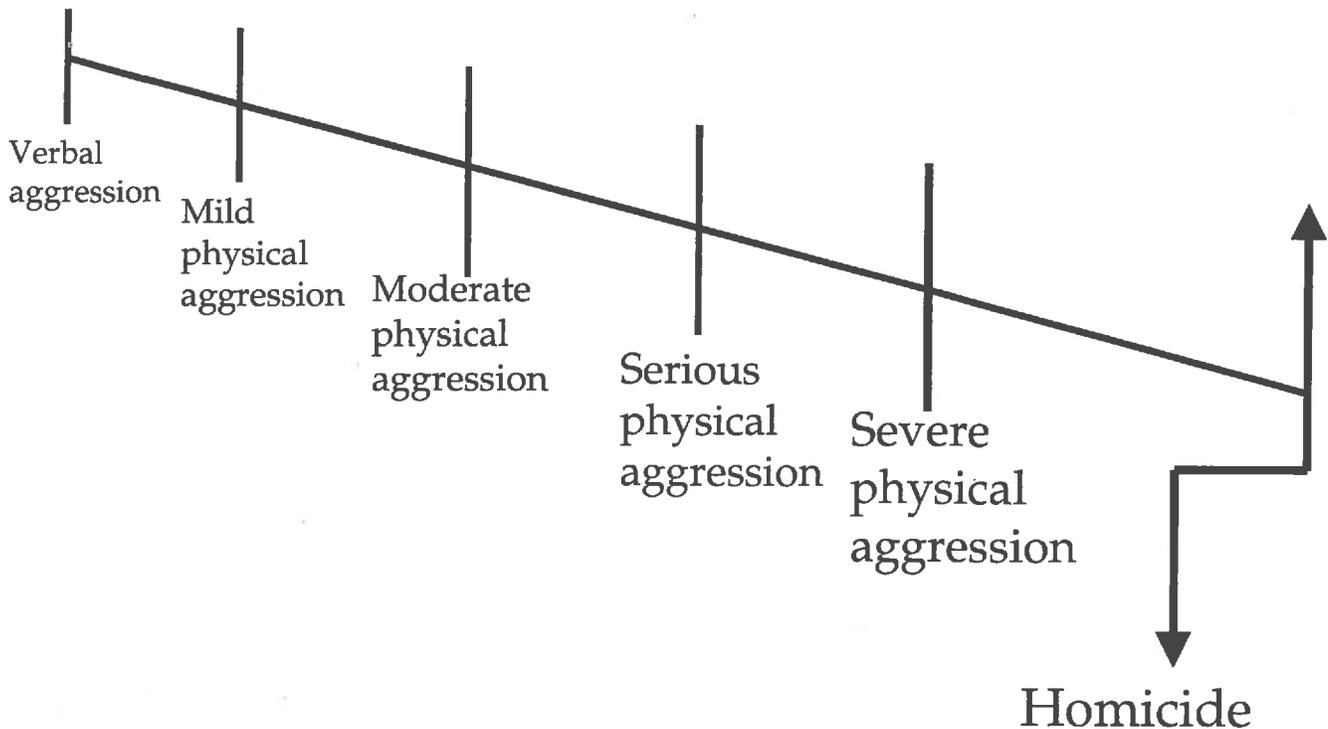
1. The victim fears more severe treatment. The batterer has threatened to find and kill or harm the victim, their children or other family members.
2. The victim depends on the batterer for shelter, food and other necessities.
3. The victim has no one to talk to who understands and believes him or her.
4. The victim believes children need two parents and doesn't want to raise them alone.
5. The victim fears being unable to take care of himself or herself and children alone.
6. The victim wants to stand by his or her partner and be loyal to the relationship.
7. The victim believes the relationship will get better.
8. The victim believes no one else will love him or her.
9. The victim's partner has threatened to commit suicide.
10. The victim wants to keep the family together and live up to a religious commitment to remain partnered.
11. The victim faces cultural influences, such as pressure to keep the family together.

# Characteristics of batterers

Researchers have found that many batterers have the following characteristics:

- Generally hostile or passive
- Rigid perceptions of sex roles
- Patriarchal attitudes
- Probably have a history of abuse by either witnessing abuse of his or her mother or being abused as a child
- Feel victimized by women
- Isolated from significant relationships outside the family
- May be extremely jealous
- Unable to discriminate emotional states other than anger or frustration
- Depends totally on partner to satisfy emotional needs
- Batterers come from every social and economic background. And they can appear to be quite charming.

# Continuum of family violence



- When partners separate, the violence does not necessarily end.
- Homicides in which a batterer is known to have killed his or her partner most frequently occur at the point of separation and up to two years after separation.
- There is no way to predict whether a specific batterer is likely to kill his or her partner.
- Batterers in same sex relationships use the same power and control tactics as heterosexual batterers.

# Perpetrator treatment

## Why treatment?

California law requires convicted perpetrators to attend 52 weeks of counseling. A small number of batterers attend counseling voluntarily.

## Challenges in intervention

High level of denial about admitting behavior or finding it wrong (as with substance abuse)

Rarely voluntary—usually follows being kicked out, family leaving or court order

Sense of entitlement in behavior toward partner

Blaming the victim (“she drove me to it” or “she deserved it”)

Extreme reluctance to take responsibility for own behavior

Attitude toward other perpetrators in treatment (“I’m not as bad as them”) makes it difficult to sustain treatment

## What treatment programs aim to accomplish

Decrease dependence on and control of victims

End intimidating behavior, verbal abuse and criticism

Increase listening skills

Increase respect for differences

Increase praise and support of others

Take responsibility for actions

Develop alternatives to abuse

## What the research shows

Treatment is successful in decreasing physical abuse. There is evidence, however, that other forms of abuse (such as verbal and psychological) may increase to compensate for the loss of physical control.

# In my culture...

## Role expectations

Who works?

Who cares for children?

What is the influence of extended family?

## Power relations

How are decisions about money made?

How are decisions about family activities made?

How controlled are the daily comings and goings of each partner?

How are conflicts resolved?

# **In a culture I've observed...**

## **Role expectations**

Who works?

Who cares for children?

What is the influence of extended family?

## **Power relations**

How are decisions about money made?

How are decisions about family activities made?

How controlled are the daily comings and goings of each partner?

How are conflicts resolved?

# Intersection of substance abuse and domestic abuse

- Although alcohol in particular is linked to the incidence of abuse, it appears to create *potential* for abuse rather than *cause* abuse.
- Although it is not known exactly how alcohol affects abuse, researchers think it works by lowering inhibitions and impairing judgement.
- Some drugs—such as crack cocaine, amphetamines and methamphetamines—are known to be associated with drug-induced psychosis and rage episodes that may result in domestic abuse.
- While alcohol does not make nonviolent people violent, it appears to lower the threshold for violence in those predisposed to violence, is often used for self-medicating and rationalization, and becomes an issue of conflict between perpetrator and victim.
- Interventions for substance abuse alone will not end domestic abuse.

## Sources:

Aramburn, B., & Leigh, B. (1991). For better or worse: Attributions about drunken aggression toward male and female victims. Violence and Victims, 6 (1), 31-44.

Barnett, D., & Fagan, R. (1993). Alcohol use in male spouse abusers and their female partners. Journal of Family Violence, 8 (1), 1-15.

Bennett, L., Tolman, R., Rogalski, C., Sninivasaraghaven, J. (1994). Domestic abuse by male alcohol and drug addicts. Violence and Victims, 9 (4), 359-368.

Senchak, M., & Leonard, K. (1994). Attributions for episodes of marital aggression: The effects of aggression severity and alcohol use. Journal of Family Violence, 9 (4), 371-381.

# Effects of substance abuse on perpetrators and victims of domestic abuse

Alcohol		Other drugs	
Perpetrator	Victim	Perpetrator	Victim
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>60-70% of batterers assault their partner while drunk</li> <li>Impairs cognitive functioning</li> <li>Disinhibits aggressive behavior</li> <li>Abusive men tend to drink quantitatively more but not more frequently than non-abusive men</li> <li>Alcohol use is self-medicating for depression, stress and consequences of abusive behavior</li> <li>Less compliant with treatment</li> <li>Early onset of alcohol-related problems related to family violence</li> <li>65% of child maltreaters were under the influence during the incident</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experience a higher level of abuse and violent acts than nonalcoholic women</li> <li>Alcoholic women experience a higher frequency of negative verbal abuse</li> <li>Stigmatization of alcoholic women may impair their help-seeking behavior</li> <li>Helpers may be less inclined to assist alcoholic women who are also being battered</li> <li>Alcoholic women may tend to under-report family violence as they feel they deserve abuse</li> <li>Perpetrator may use victim's alcoholism as a rationale for battering</li> <li>May use alcohol as a result of abusive incidents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>13-20% of batterers assault their partner while high on other drugs</li> <li>Impairs cognitive functioning</li> <li>Disinhibits aggressive behavior</li> <li>May result in drug-induced psychosis</li> <li>May result in rage and subsequent violence</li> <li>Cocaine use is positively associated with violent behavior</li> <li>History of arrest, especially associated with substance abuse, is related to violence</li> <li>Cocaine and crack are found to be associated with greater harm to children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children under age 5 who experienced maltreatment were more likely than older children to have a parent with a drug problem</li> <li>Congenital effects of prenatal drug exposure</li> <li>Adolescent substance use and abuse is a frequent source of parent-adolescent conflict that may lead to violence</li> </ul>

Perpetrator	Victim	Perpetrator	Victim
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 24% of substantiated child abuse reports involved a caretaker whose primary substance was alcohol</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Congenital effects: fetal alcohol syndrome fetal alcohol effect</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Impaired capacity to recognize children's cues</li> <li>▪ Inability to respond to child's cues</li> <li>▪ More compulsive</li> <li>▪ Less emotionally available</li> <li>▪ Spend less time with child</li> <li>▪ Socially isolated</li> </ul>	

Sources:

Aramburn, B., & Leigh, B. (1991). For better or worse: Attributions about drunken aggression toward male and female victims. *Violence and Victims*, *6* (1), 31-44.

Barnett, D., & Fagan, R. (1993). Alcohol use in male spouse abusers and their female partners. *Journal of Family Violence*, *8* (1), 1-15.

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Downs, W., Miller, B., & Panek, D. (1993). Differential patterns of partner-to-woman violence: A comparison of samples of community, alcohol-abusive and battered women. *Journal of Family Violence*, *8* (2), 113-135.

Magura, S., & Laudent, A. (1996). Parental substance abuse and child maltreatment: Review and implications for interventions. *Child and Youth Services Review*, *18* (3), 193-220.

Senchak, M., & Leonard, K. (1994). Attributions for episodes of marital aggression: The effects of aggression severity and alcohol use. *Journal of Family Violence*, *9* (4), 371-381.

# Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

## What causes it?

- Experiencing or witnessing an event that involved real or threatened death or serious injury to self or others and
- A response that includes intense fear, helplessness or horror

## DSM-IV diagnostic criteria

- Existence of a recognizable stressor that would evoke significant symptoms of distress in almost anyone
- Re-experiencing the trauma
- Numbing of responsiveness or reduced involvement with the external world, beginning some time after the trauma
- Symptoms that were not present before the trauma

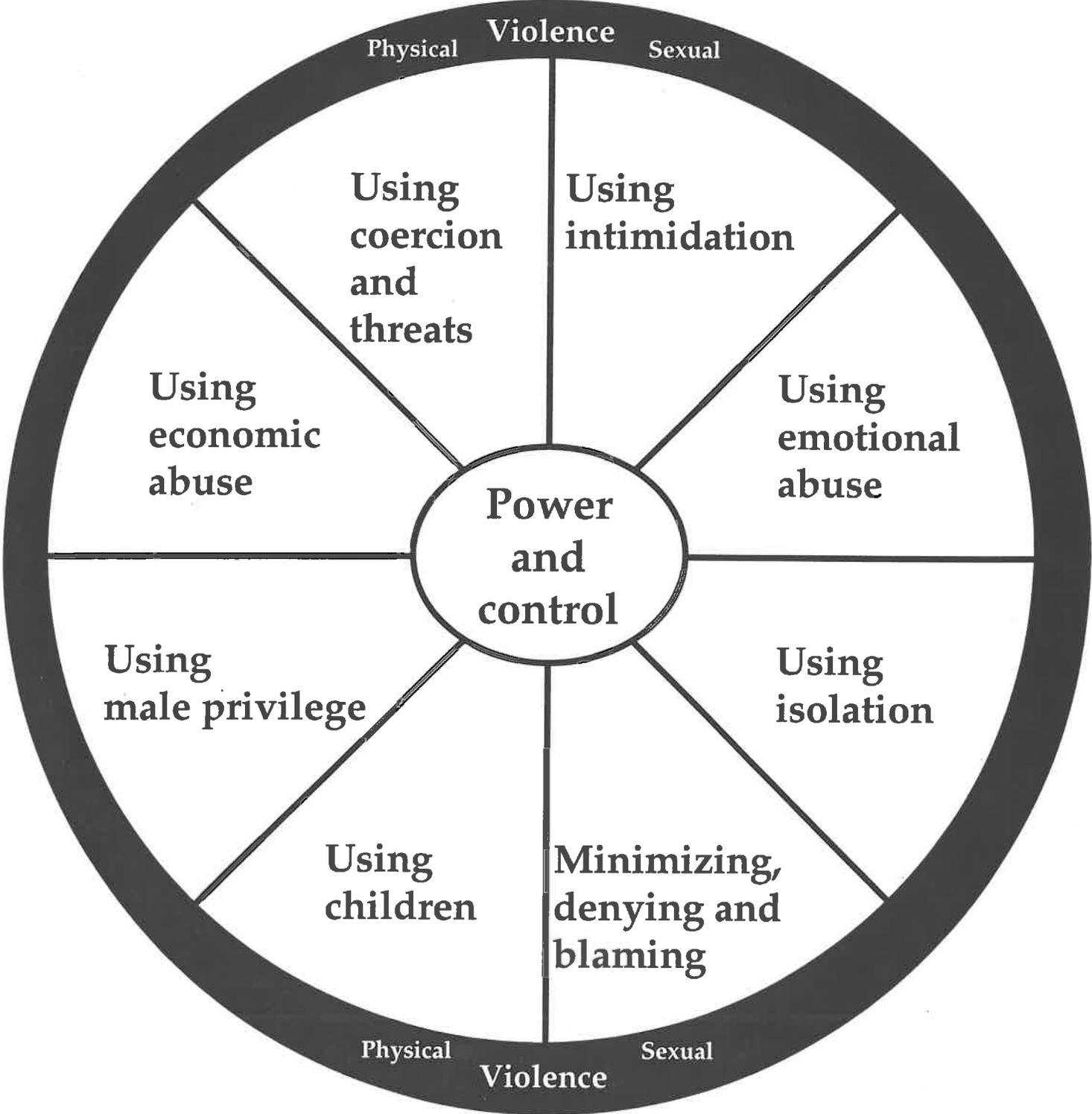
## Some symptoms

- Re-experiencing the trauma through recurrent and intrusive thoughts, nightmares, flashbacks and other associations, especially when experiencing something perceived as similar to the trauma or on the anniversary of the trauma
- Efforts to avoid thoughts, feelings or stimuli associated with the trauma through actions that can include self-medication
- Emotional numbness, sleep disturbances, depression, anxiety, guilt or angry outbursts
- Feelings of detachment from others
- Inability to experience a full range of emotional response
- Diminished interest in the usual and significant activities of life

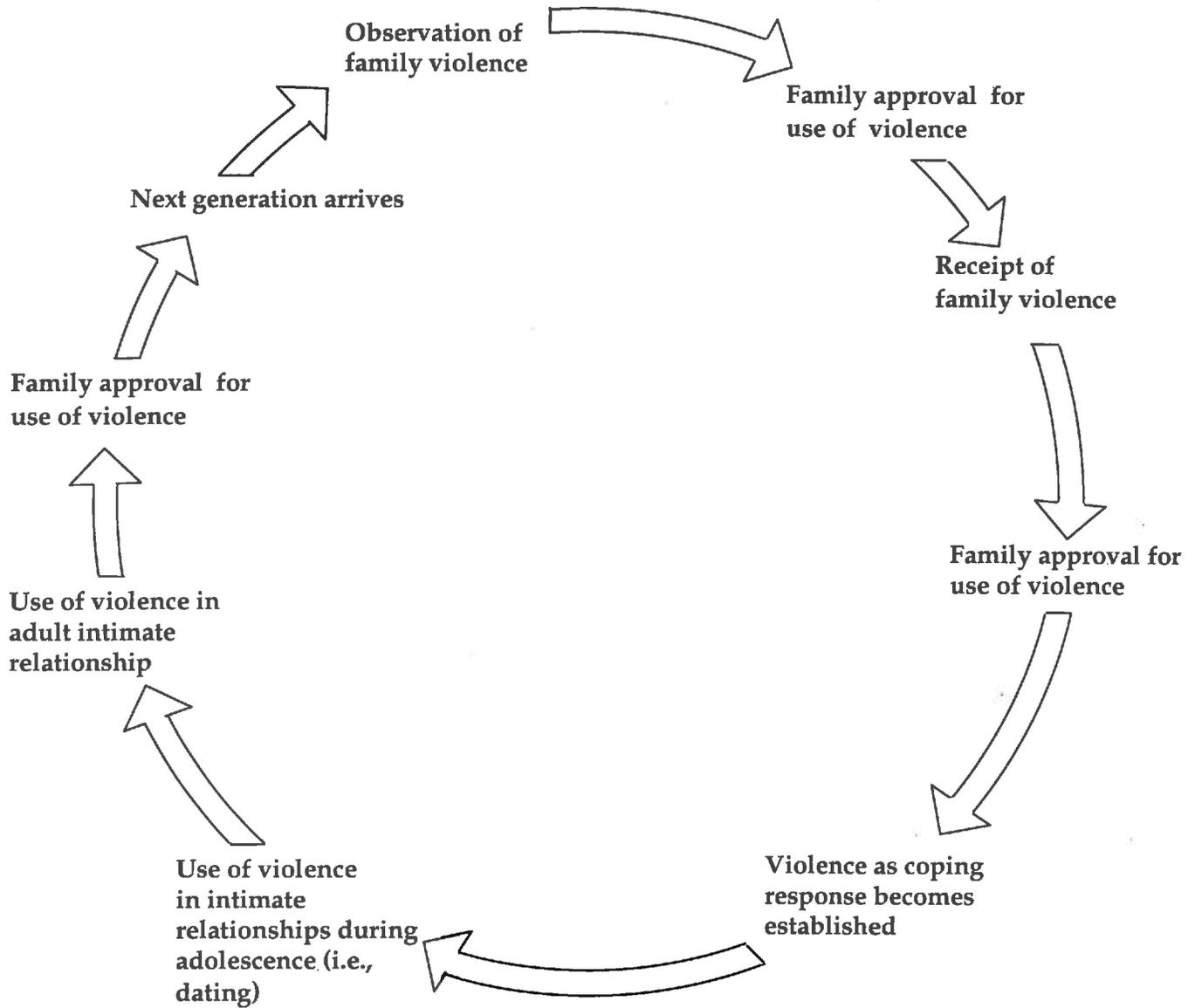
## Treatment

- Therapy or counseling
- Support from family and friends

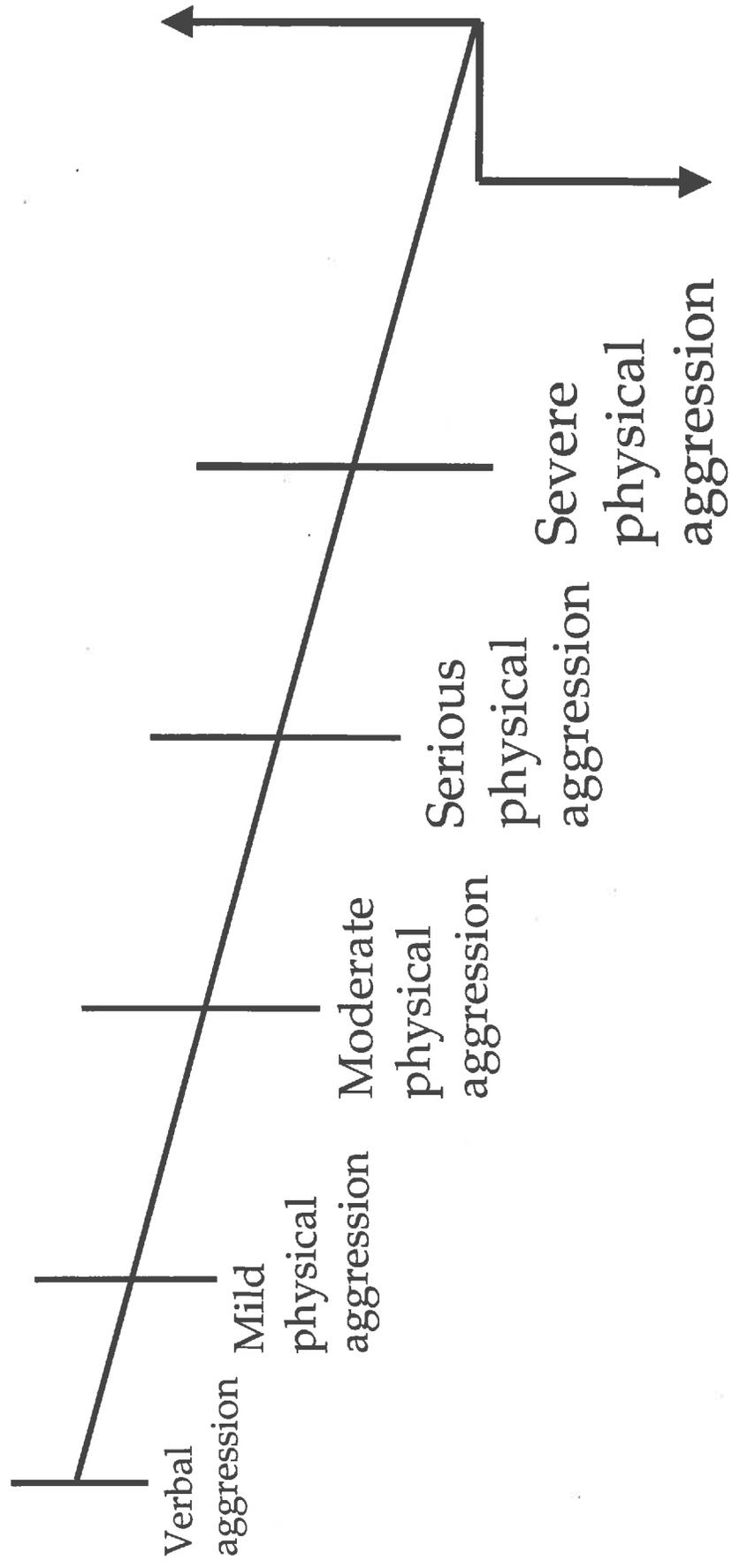
# **Trainer Overheads**



# Intergenerational transmission of violence



# Continuum of family violence



# **Dynamics of domestic abuse**

- **Domestic abuse is a learned behavior.**
- **Domestic abuse typically involves repetitive behavior.**
- **Domestic abuse is the responsibility of the perpetrator.**
- **Perpetrators and victims of abuse are found in all groups of people.**
- **The victim's behaviors are a strategy for self-survival.**

# **Culture affects how we**

**Think**

**Feel**

**Behave**

**Partner**

**Parent**

**Seek help**

**Look for**

**Similarities and  
differences**

**Among cultures and  
between cultures**

# Indicators of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

- Existence of a recognizable stressor that would evoke significant symptoms of distress in almost anyone
- Re-experiencing the trauma
- Numbing of responsiveness or reduced involvement with the external world, beginning some time after the trauma
- Symptoms that were not present before the trauma