

# WHY DO WOMEN STAY?

Understanding reasons, fears, motivations and beliefs ...



# Reasons For Staying

People often wonder why women stay in or return to abusive/violent relationships. From an outsider's point of view it can be difficult to understand why she doesn't just leave. Leaving any relationship can be hard to do and emotionally draining. Leaving a relationship that involves, control, violence, fear and an imbalance of power requires accessing all personal resources available and often requires external support as real safety risks are involved.

## Her own feelings and beliefs ...

Most women still do love their partners and want nothing more than a "happy" relationship. Women usually see it as their responsibility to keep a relationship together and treat a broken relationship as a personal failure – falling short as a woman. Each time he promises "it will never happen again/I'll change" she desperately wants to believe him, her hopes soar and she usually ends up giving him chance after chance.

- Self-blame/sharing responsibility for his violence
- Guilt/shame/embarrassment
- Low self-worth
- Feeling like you are 'going crazy'
- Hope that he will change
- Love
- Minimising how serious things have become
- Self-doubt
- Fear of retribution (threats to harm/kill self or others)
- Loss of the belief that it is possible to leave (feeling trapped)
- Suicidal thoughts
- Experiencing Depression and/or Anxiety
- A sense of helplessness resulting from intimidation and demoralisation
- Reduced ability to think clearly and objectively
- Concerns about never recovering, experiencing love in the future, or being able to recognise a healthy relationship, or trust someone else again

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## Lack of Resources ...

Many women have to leave with nothing but the clothes they and their children are wearing. Thereafter the partner will make things as difficult financially as he possibly can in order to try to force her to return. Unless the women have a well-paid job or help from the family, she cannot scrape up enough money to start over and to support her children properly. In this country, the majority of those living in poverty are single parents families headed by women.

- Poverty/ lack of financial independence
- Financial dependency on him
- Lack of knowledge of what is available
- Shortage of safe accommodation
- Lack of support
- Transport
- Concerns about not being able to obtain employment



# Reasons For Staying

## Psychosocial Reasons ...

### *Pressure from others:*

The man often enlists the help of relatives, friends, the children, religious leaders etc. to get her back. He may have denied her abuse and violence and told them she was sick and emotionally unstable. Many people put enormous pressures on women to keep the marriage together. The man often enlists the help of relatives, friends, the children, religious leaders etc. to get her back. He may have denied her abuse and violence and told them she was sick and emotionally unstable. Many people put enormous pressures on women to keep the marriage together at all costs.

### *Feeling pressure to comply with societal beliefs ...*

- Traditional female role
- Keeping the home life private
- Feeling responsible for maintaining harmony
- Religious vows

### *The Children:*

The children may beg her to go back. They have a love/hate relationship with their father. They will be very confused and unhappy. Most kids want their parents to stay together, stop fighting and be happy. Kids don't like being from a "broken home". Most mothers really want their children to have a loving relationship with their father and feel really guilty about leaving a depriving the father and children of this relationship.

*- Children – fear of their removal; access issues; police involvement; coping with their emotional and behavioural disturbances -*

### *Inability to cope with kids:*

Children raised in domestic violence are often emotionally and behaviourally disturbed and many women find themselves unable to cope with the children alone.

*- Childcare needs -*

### *Fear of Death:*

In Australia, on average 2 women a week are killed as a result of domestic violence. Most of these killings occur as the women are attempting to leave or after she has left. It is the most dangerous time for a woman in a violent relationship.

### *Stalking:*

Many men stalk their partners after they leave and wage a campaign of terror, which wears the woman down until she finally agrees to go back to him for the sake of "peace".

*- Survival instincts -*

### *Other underlying Factors:*

- Social or geographical isolation
- Lack of support/judgement from others
- Shortage of specialist services
- Lack of knowledge of legal information and options
- Being constantly monitored makes it feel impossible



# Understanding Her Beliefs

## At first, she stays because ...

- She loves him
- She believes he'll grow up or change
- She can't admit how serious the problem is
- She believes she can control the beatings by doing as he says
- She believes she can convince him that she loves him (and end his jealousy)
- She believes it is her duty to make the relationship work
- She believes him when he says their problems are her fault
- She believes she can reason with him
- She believes him when he says he's sorry and he won't do it again
- She's embarrassed for him and herself, so she seldom seeks help
- She's afraid of what will happen if the police get involved

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## Later, she stays because ...

- She loves him, but less
- She hopes he will change or get help
- She's under pressure from family and friends to stay
- She believes he loves her and needs her
- She's afraid to be alone
- She believes she can't support herself and the children
- She believes his promise that he will change and that they'll start living the life she dreams of, that he will get counselling, that he will stop abusing drugs or alcohol, etc.
- She is confused
- She is increasingly afraid of her partner's violence; she knows he is capable of carrying out his threats

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## Finally, she stays because ...

- Fear: he has become tremendously powerful in her eyes
- He threatens to kill her, the children, her family or himself
- She has developed low self-esteem
- She believes no one can love her
- She believes she can't live alone
- She is very confused and feels guilty: "He cares, he beats me, I must be inadequate, I must deserve this, I don't know why"
- She becomes depressed and immobile; decisions are difficult, sometimes impossible for her to make
- She's tries unsuccessfully to stop the violence and now believes that handling the situation is impossible
- She believes she has no options
- She has developed serious emotional and physical problems
- She has become suicidal or homicidal



# Another way to look at it (Brainwashing)

## So why don't they leave?

*"If it's as bad as she says, why doesn't she leave?"*

*"She must be a masochist – she keeps going back."*

There are many compelling reasons why women can't leave or stay separated from abusive/violent partners. The major reason is that they have been subjected to a process of 'brainwashing' by their partners.

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## Brainwashing ...

During the Korean War, many of the U.S. Servicemen who were captured by the North Koreans emerged from prison camps completely converted to the ideologies of their enemy.

Concerned about the methods that must have been used to achieve this turnaround, Amnesty International conducted the first serious research into the phenomenon of 'brainwashing'. The findings were published in their "Report on Torture" and are summarised in "Biderman's Chart of Coercion" (Biderman being the researcher).

The "Chart of Coercion" lists the specific processes used by captors to intimidate and demoralise their captives. These processes make the prisoners feel fearful, helpless and dependent on their captors, this they are much easier to control. They also have the effect, over time, of making the prisoners disorientated-unable to think logically and critically and evaluate information which is given to them.

These processes have, of course, been used throughout history and still continue to be used by tyrannical individuals and groups throughout the world who wish to impose their will and ideologies on others.

During the 1980 researchers into domestic violence were shocked to realise that the tactics used by abusive/violent men to maintain control of their partners are exactly the same ones used in situations of warfare and terrorism.



# Chart of Coercion

Information  
has been  
Interpreted  
from  
Biderman's  
Original  
'Chart of  
Coercion'

## Isolation ...

*Deprives victim of all social support (for the) ability to resist*  
*Develops an intense concern with self*  
*Makes victim depend on interrogator*

Abusers use many ways of keeping their partners cut off from family, friends and other possible sources of help. This reduces her chances of "breaking the silence", telling others the truth about what's really happening and of escaping. It also means that she is not "influenced" by other's opinions or evaluations of her situation and that she only hears his view of everything (and with an abusive person, this is always a very distorted view). It also makes her totally dependent on him. (Most women in Domestic Violence see that their actual survival – whether they ultimately live or die – is dependent on their partners).

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## Monopolisation of Perception ...

*Fixes attention upon immediate predicament; fosters introspection*  
*Eliminates stimuli competing with those controlled by captor*  
*Frustrates all actions not consistent with compliance*

The women's attention is always focused on the partner's anger – what will set him off? – what will calm him down? Many women describe it as "always walking on eggshells". They are so concerned with day to day survival; protecting themselves and their children from his wrath; that they cannot focus on how they might achieve a different sort of life. It keeps them captive and "obedient".

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## Induced Debility and Exhaustion ...

*Weakens mental and physical ability to resist*

Many women will report that they are never allowed to rest, even when they are ill. Their partners expect them to be busy at all times. Even when the man is at work he will often ring home many times during the day to check on what she is doing. Many women are woken at all hours of the night to provide sex or get cups of tea/coffee, snacks or even full blown meals or just because he can't sleep and doesn't see why she should either. The resulting state of physical and emotional weakness makes it difficult to argue or plan to escape.



## Threats ...

*Cultivates anxiety and despair*

Keeps the women in a constant state of terror. The threats are usually about what he'll do to her (or the children, or her family) if ever she tells anyone or tries to leave him.

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## Occasional Indulgences ...

*Provides positive motivation for compliance*

Builds up hope in the women and makes her want to persevere with the relationship. Maybe he's not so bad after all. Maybe there is hope he will change. He can be so nice when he wants to.

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## Demonstrating "Omnipotence" ...

*Suggests futility of resistance*

The abuser's continual demonstration of complete power and control over the victim is a constant reminder of the futility of resistance.

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## Enforcing Trivial Demands ...

*Develops habit of compliance*

Ensures that she will automatically and unquestionable obey him in every small detail.

