



Profiles of Abusive Relationships

Profile of an abusive husband. He frequently comes from an abusive home, has low self-esteem, believes in male supremacy, blames others for his actions. He is childish, does things to excess (battering, spending, even buying gifts for her), but is possessive and jealous. He often presents a dual personality—both charming and cruel, selfish and generous, macho but fearful his woman will leave him. He has little tolerance for stress, uses sex as an act of aggression, and doesn't believe his violence should have negative consequences. His violence increases when his self-esteem is threatened—by trouble at work, when his wife's income or education surpasses his, when he fails as a provider.

The batterer is frequently described as an out-of-control person, but in fact, he does have a degree of control. He rarely abuses his wife in front of others and may become skilled at violence that doesn't show, such as choking or beating parts of the body normally covered by clothes.

Portrait of an abused wife. The woman holds traditional values regarding the home, marriage, and family. She usually did not experience violence in her home as a child and it was not evident in the courtship, when her man made her feel loved, special. So, she was shocked the first time abuse occurred (often during her first pregnancy). She may have been a victim in other ways (rape, death of a parent, molestation, alcoholic parent) and struggles with low self-esteem. She believes she is responsible for her husband's violence, feels guilt and shame, yet denies her terror and anger.

Because she seems to do little to help herself, she appears passive but, in fact, she has great strength and works very hard to keep peace in her home and just to survive. She comes to believe no one can help her because her husband is so powerful, almost omnipotent. But she is not masochistic ("asks for it" or likes it), nor mentally unbalanced. She comes from every racial, educational, and economic background.

Beverly Bush Smith & Patricia DeVorss, *Caught in the Middle* (Tyndale House, 1988), 142-143.