

RELATIONSHIP ABUSE: see it. stop it. help a friend.

MYTH: RELATIONSHIP ABUSE DOESN'T HAPPEN HERE AT STANFORD.

FACT: Between 2000–2007, there were 152 reports of relationship abuse at Stanford. According to the American Bar Association, 28% of female students on college campuses experience relationship abuse. The U.S. Dept. of Justice has estimated that only 38% of relationship abuse incidents are reported. And even if it was only one report every year, that would still be one report too many.

MYTH: MEN AND WOMEN ARE EQUALLY LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE RELATIONSHIP ABUSE.

FACT: According to the U.S. Bureau of Justice, 95% of relationship abuse survivors are women. This is not to minimize, in any way, the experience of men as survivors in abusive relationships, but instead to highlight the fact that this is a type of gender violence. This does not mean all men are abusive. In the same way that all NFL players are men, but most men aren't NFL players—most abusers are men, but most men aren't abusive.

MYTH: WOMEN ARE JUST AS VIOLENT AS MEN. MOST ABUSE IS MUTUAL.

FACT: There is always a dominant aggressor, someone whose actions are part of a larger pattern of abusive behavior. Studies that say abuse is mutual are based on a flawed research tool called the "Conflict Tactics Scale" (CTS). CTS does not control for the use of force in self-defense. For instance, if a man is strangling a woman and she scratches him to get him to stop, they each get "one point" on the CTS.

MYTH: ALCOHOL AND DRUGS ARE CAUSES OF RELATIONSHIP ABUSE.

FACT: While things like alcohol and drug use may exacerbate relationship abuse, for instance by giving the abuser something to blame his behavior on, remember that there are many people who drink alcohol who don't abuse their partners. **Abuse is always a choice, a conscious effort to maintain power and control over a partner, caused by things like a sense of entitlement and superiority and the belief that they can get away with it.**

MYTH: RELATIONSHIP ABUSE IS A PART OF SOME CULTURES.

FACT: Relationship abuse can and does happen to anyone, regardless of race or ethnicity. This myth is a problem of reporting, institutional racism and misconceptions about other cultures. While some groups may be less likely to report relationship abuse, this does not mean that it doesn't happen in those groups. A lack of culturally sensitive resources can make it more difficult for a survivor to leave, and there may be culturally-specific barriers. However, all cultures have traditions of resistance against gender violence. **Abuse is not inherent or natural to any culture—it is always a choice.**

MYTH: RELATIONSHIP ABUSE DOES NOT OCCUR IN SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS.

FACT: Relationship abuse occurs at roughly the same rate in same-sex relationships as it does in heterosexual relationships. The abuser may be the larger or the smaller partner, and there can be different tactics of control used; for instance, the abusive partner may threaten to out the other partner to her family or professor. In our still largely homophobic society, the threat of "outing" someone who is not ready can be used to isolate and silence a person who is experiencing relationship abuse.

MYTH: ABUSE OCCURS WHEN THE PERPETRATOR LOSES CONTROL.

FACT: Abuse is not about anger management. For example, abusers do not choose to hit their bosses or TAs, no matter how angry they are. The abuse is targeted and controlled—perpetrators choose to be violent only against their intimate partners.

MYTH: IF IT WAS REALLY ABUSE, SHE WOULD LEAVE.

FACT: There are many reasons why a person may stay in an abusive relationship, here are a few: Relationship abuse tends to escalate and she may fear retaliation if she leaves. She may be afraid no one will believe her or what people may think about her, she may have to see her partner all the time on campus and leaving the relationship may mean leaving a community.

MYTH: PEOPLE MAKE A BIG DEAL ABOUT RELATIONSHIP ABUSE, BUT IT'S NOT THAT COMMON.

FACT: According to replicated studies by the American Psychological Association and Heise, L., Ellsberg, M. and Gottemoeller, **1 in 3 women will have been abused in her lifetime.**

MYTH: THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO TO HELP.

FACT: Name the abuse for what it is, listen without judging, don't tell her what to do—instead empower her to make her own decisions—and direct a friend to resources below. Tell her you'll be there for her no matter what she decides to do.

RESOURCES:

National Relationship Abuse hotline – 1.800.799.7233 (24 hours, confidential)
Sexual Assault – YWCA hotline 650.725.9955 (24 hours, confidential)

*Brought to you by the Stanford Partnership to End Violence Against Women
in collaboration with the Center for Relationship Abuse Awareness*