

The Family Room

By Dr. Don Whitehead

What Motivates Abusers?

Norm abuses his wife. (All characters are fictitious.) He is fifty years old and holds a responsible position in his community. Most of the abuse is verbal, though he has pushed her and kicked her a couple of times in the last few years. He often calls her fat, lazy and other names that cannot be printed here. When she talks of leaving him, he threatens that he "won't give her a dime." Since she is dependent on him for money, she stays.

Sam also abuses his wife. He is worse when he is drinking or doing cocaine. Sam has not held a steady job in years and requires his wife to work. She gives him her money, and he pays the bills, sometimes. He broke her jaw last year, but she lied and told the doctor that she fell. He tells her that if she ever leaves him, he will kill her. Not surprisingly, she stays.

What motivates abusers like Norm and Sam? Why would someone deliberately hurt the woman he says he loves?

The primary motivation for most abusers is THEIR OWN INSECURITY. They feel so uncertain about themselves that they think they must hold onto their spouses to keep them from leaving. The verbal abuse and the hitting are designed to keep the

woman close by. "Keep her feeling bad enough, and she'll stay" is their motto.

Most abusers are emotionally dependent on their victims. They feel they cannot live without their women and must keep them close at all costs. When the woman leaves, an abuser may fall apart emotionally. He will visit everyone he knows, crying and telling them how much he loves her and how much he wants her back. He

is devastated because the woman on whom he is emotionally dependent has left, and he will do anything to get her back.

Another motivation for abusers is anger. Most abusers are very angry and do not know how to deal with that feeling. The anger is so strong that it will come out no matter how the victim behaves. She may feel it is something that she does to provoke the anger, but that is not true. The anger is there and it will come out, usually at the person closest to the abuser. More and more courts are ordering abusers into anger management classes to try to deal with this part of the problem.

The anger of the abuser may be a symptom of depression. I have seen abusers who have become considerably less angry when treated for depression with medication and counseling. Most abusers refuse treatment except under court order. Abusers usually do not see that they have a problem, preferring to blame the abuse on the victim!

Why are these men angry? Sometimes it is because they have them-

selves been abused as children. Not every abuser grew up in an abusive home, but many did. When Dad beat them, they could do nothing about it. Naturally they felt hurt and angry but, no outlet for these feelings. The anger built up until as an adult they began to take it out on others.

Alcohol and drugs do not cause abuse, but they can worsen the problem. Alcohol loosens his inhibitions so the abuser may demonstrate his anger more forcibly than when he is sober. Other drugs seem to intensify the anger. An angry man who drinks or does drugs is a disaster waiting to happen.

Again the primary motivation for abusers is their own insecurity. They will do whatever they can to control their spouses and keep them at home.

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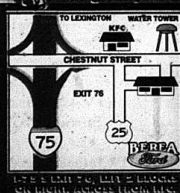
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