



# The challenges of leaving an abuser

**Leaving a violent situation of abuse can sometimes take time. It's common for women to make four to seven attempts to leave before they are successful**

One of the main reasons women don't immediately leave their violent partners is that they believe it's too unsafe to leave. Victims of domestic violence are usually in the best position to figure out what needs to be done to ensure their safety and the safety of those around them.

Other factors that often make it very challenging for women to leave an abusive relationship are: traditional views about the place of women; the perception that domestic violence is a private issue; economic factors; a lack of social support for women and their children; access to housing; and a lack of understanding about domestic violence.

There are many things that keep women in relationships with someone who abuses them. Being in a violent relationship can erode self-esteem and lead to low confidence. This can occur after even a short period of abuse.

We acknowledge the amazing courage and strength of women who are able to overcome the challenges and leave or positively change a situation of abuse.

**Here are 10 common reasons women choose to stay:**

## **1. Leaving can be the most dangerous time**

Abusers often threaten to kill women, the children or themselves if she leaves. Many women are stalked and harassed by ex-partners, and violence can escalate when a Protection Order is served on the abuser. Abusers can even make arrangements from prison to send friends or family to assault or threaten women.



If women leave they have less chance of predicting when violence will happen, and women who stay may be doing what they think is necessary to stay alive and protect their children.

## **2. Lack of money**

Women and children's standard of living often drops significantly when they leave a violent relationship. Women may not have any access to the family's money. Some women, especially migrant women, may not know where to go for financial help or may not be eligible for benefits. They may not even have possession of their or their childrens' passports.

Women may never have been allowed to deal with money, and they are worried they won't be able to survive. Some women may feel they won't be able to get a job to support themselves. Going on a benefit may also mean a huge drop in income, and it might not cover all the bills.

## **3. Nowhere to go**

If family and friends can't provide a place to stay, moving house can be very difficult for women with little money, or for women with disabilities or those who live in remote areas. Landlords may not want to rent to women if the violent person has caused problems in the household – e.g. if bills haven't been paid, the neighbours have complained, and/or the house has been damaged.

## **4. Fear of losing your children**

Abusers often threaten to inform Child, Youth and Family that women are bad or abusive mothers. Abusers also often say that if she leaves, they will never let her get the children. Mistrust from previous negative experience of government agencies and the justice system can mean women are unwilling to allow authorities to become involved. If the abuser has access to the children the woman can't control what happens when she is not there. Also, the children might not want to leave their father.



## 5. A belief in family values

Some women believe that parents should stay together for the sake of the children, or that marriage/commitment is for life. The religious or cultural beliefs of some families mean that they pressure women to stay despite the violence, and some women may believe that there needs to be a male around for the children's sake. Some genuinely want to make their relationship work, no matter what.

## 6. Not being believed

Many people still don't understand domestic violence, and blame women. It might be hard for people to accept that there is violence if an older woman has hidden it all her life, especially as abusers can be charming, friendly, and respected in the community. Some people think women 'make it up' to get back at men. Many people believe that violence doesn't happen in lesbian relationships, or they think the violence is not as bad for lesbians.

## 7. I still love him

Many women think that they can change the abuser, especially if they remember the charming person that the abuser was in the beginning. Abusers often promise to change. Women want the violence to stop because they still have feelings for the abuser - despite the violence, there may be times of companionship and socialising, and the woman may not want to be left alone.

## 8. Social isolation

Abusers often isolate women, and make it difficult for women to have friends or stay in touch with their whānau or family. Migrant women and lesbians may feel ashamed or unsafe about speaking out in their close-knit communities. Women may risk losing a lot by leaving, such as a house, friends, money and status.



## **9. Not wanting to be judged by others**

Some women feel whakamā or ashamed, fearing others may think they are a failure, or a weak or bad person. There are still many social expectations about being in a couple, and children needing two parents, which makes it challenging for women to leave. Women may feel ashamed and guilty that they have hit their abuser at some point, planned to hurt him, or have hit their children.

## **10. Isn't being abused normal?**

If women have been brought up in violent families, they might not know there is any other way to live. Domestic violence can be generational, making it challenging to stop the cycle of abuse.