



# IMPRODOVA

## Factsheet

### Indicators for domestic violence

#### Identification of domestic violence

It is important for health service providers to be aware that a victim's health problems may be caused or made worse by violence. Victims subjected to domestic violence in relationships seek health services for related emotional or physical conditions, including injuries. However, often they do not tell the provider about the violence due to shame or fear of being judged or fear of their partner. To tackle domestic abuse, it is essential that victims are identified and disclose their abuse as early as possible. People experiencing domestic abuse are more likely to come into contact with health services than other public services. As a health professional you will be a first point of contact for many.

#### Indicators for domestic violence

The following are indicators associated with victims of domestic violence. Please note that none or all of these might be present and be indicators of other issues. Some victims also give hints in conversation and their behaviour can also be revealing. Victims are therefore dependent on being listened to, one being persistent and asking for signs and clues. This is where using these indicators as a guide can complement the practice of asking directly.

#### Indicators for adults

##### Possible physical indicators

Unexplained bruising and other injuries

- especially head, neck and facial injuries
  - bruises of various ages
  - injuries sustained do not fit the history given
  - bite marks, unusual burns

- injuries on parts of the body hidden from view (including breasts, abdomen and/or genitals), especially if pregnant
- chapped lips
- teeth knocked out
- Miscarriages and other pregnancy complications
- Chronic conditions including headaches, pain and aches in muscles, joints and back
- Sexually transmitted infection and other gynaecological problems

##### Possible psychological indicators

- Emotional distress, e.g. anxiety, indecisiveness, confusion and hostility
- Sleeping and eating disorders
- Anxiety / depression / pre-natal depression
- Psychosomatic complaints
- Self-harm or suicide attempts
- Evasive or ashamed about injuries
- Seeming anxious in the presence of their partner
- Social isolation / no access to transport
- Frequent absences from work or studies
- Submissive behaviour / low self-esteem
- Alcohol or drug abuse
- fear of physical contact
- nervous reactions to physical contact/ quick and unexpected movements

##### Possible indicators for sexual violence

- injuries to the genitals, the inside of the thighs, the breasts, the anus

- irritations and redness in the genital area
- common infections in the genital area
- pain in the lower abdomen and/or pelvic area
- sexually transmitted diseases
- bleeding in the vaginal or rectal area
- pain when urinating or defecating
- pain when sitting or walking
- strong fears of examinations in the genital area; avoidance of examinations
- severe cramps in the vaginal area during gynaecological examinations
- sexual problems
- self-harming behaviour
- unwanted pregnancies / abortions
- complications during pregnancy
- miscarriages

## Possible indicators for children

### Possible physical indicators

- Difficulty eating / sleeping
- Slow weight gain (in infants)
- Physical complaints
- Eating disorders (including problems of breast feeding)
- Fingertip injuries

### Possible psychological indicators

- Aggressive behaviour and language
- Depression, anxiety and/or suicide attempts
- Appearing nervous and withdrawn
- Difficulty adjusting to change
- Regressive behaviour in toddlers
- Delays or problems with language development
- Psychosomatic illness
- Restlessness and problems with concentration
- Dependent, sad or secretive behaviours
- Bedwetting

- 'Acting out', for example cruelty to animals
- Noticeable decline in school performance
- Fighting with peers
- Overprotective or afraid to leave mother
- Stealing and social isolation
- Exhibiting sexually abusive behaviour
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Transience

Once the presence of domestic violence has been confirmed, further action must be taken:

- Documentation of the victim's injuries and report of violence for legal purposes
- Ensure the immediate safety of the victim and assess the risk of serious/fatal reoccurrence of abuse
- referral of the victim for further intervention or informing him or her about available services.

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