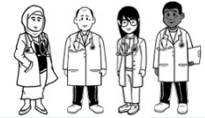


Indicators of domestic violence

Factsheet

“As health professional, you will be the first and only contact for many victims.”



The role of medical professionals

Victims may not always want to report domestic violence (DV) to the police or speak to a counsellor of an NGO. In addition, due to other non-domestic violence related visits to the medical sector (e.g. control appointments at the dentist, diabetes management, skin cancer screening) they do have doctor's appointments more frequently and at this point their physician/dentist might detect signs of domestic violence although it was not intended by the victims.

Consequently, **healthcare professionals are often the first** beside friends and family, who either hear about the presence of DV or they are the first **ones recognising indicators** and **symptoms** pointing towards DV.

Impact of domestic violence

While each individual will experience domestic violence uniquely, there are many common consequences of living in an environment with violence and/or living in fear. It is important to understand the effects of domestic violence on victims, because those effects are responsible for many indicators they present to us.

Possible psychiatric symptoms / disorders:

- Pain-syndromes
- Poor nutrition/eating disorders
- Depression/poor mental health
- Sleep disturbances
- Self-harming
- Suicidal attempts/thoughts
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Panic or anxiety disorders

Possible psychological impact:

- Hopelessness
- Feeling unworthy
- Inability to trust
- Feelings of isolation
- Loss of self-esteem/confidence
- Tiredness
- Anger
- Misusing drugs, alcohol etc.

Impact of domestic violence on a child

Living in a household where there is domestic violence can pose a serious threat to children's emotional, psychological, and physical wellbeing. Particularly so, if the violence is persistent over a long period of time. Children and youth witnessing domestic violence are at high risk of becoming inadvertently involved in the violence/abuse, e.g., being accidentally caught up in an assault or being used as part of emotional blackmail or manipulation by the perpetrator.



Please note that the lists are not exhaustive; it represents only a selection.



Find more information on **the impact on children** [here](#).



Please note that **none or all of these indicators might be present** or may be indicators of other issues, but they can serve as warning signs and a reason for increased attention and can point towards a history of DV.



Find detailed information to **communication** in [Modul 3](#).



Helpful **sources** can be found [here](#).

Indicators of domestic violence

Health care professionals should always ask about domestic violence when taken medical history. Victims rely on health professionals to listen, persist, and enquire about signs and cues. They need them to follow-up on conversations in private, record details of behaviours, feelings and injuries seen and reported, and support them in line with their organisation's systems and local pathways.

Individuals from **diverse cultural backgrounds** may **manifest their symptoms differently**. Please remain conscious of your own perspective, biases, and stereotypes when communicating with a potential victim, as these factors can impact how you assess the symptoms. Find more information in [Modul 8](#).

Possible health indicators

- Chronic conditions including headaches, pain and aches in muscles, joints and back
- Difficulty eating/sleeping
- Cardiologic symptoms without evidence of cardiac disease (heart palpitation, arterial hypertension, myocardial infarction without obstructive disease)

Possible psychological indicators

- Emotional distress, e.g., anxiety, indecisiveness, and hostility
- Self-harm or suicide attempts
- Psychosomatic complaints
- Sleeping and eating disorders (e.g. anorexia, bulimia, binge eating)
- Depression/pre-natal depression
- Social isolation/no access to transport or money
- Submissive behaviour/low self-esteem
- Fear of physical contact
- Alcohol or drug abuse

Possible behavioural indicators

- Frequent use of medical treatment in various facilities
- The constant change of doctors
- Disproportionately long-time interval between the occurrence of injury and treatment
- Faltering response when being asked about medical history
- Denial, conflicting explanations about the cause of the injury
- Overprotective behaviour of the accompanying person, controlling behaviour
- Frequent absence from work or studies
- Evasive or ashamed about injuries
- Seeming anxious in the presence of their partner or family members
- Nervous reactions to physical contact/quick and unexpected movements
- Easily startled behaviour or crying when being asked questions
- Extreme defensive reactions when asked specific questions