

# What You Need To Know: Spousal Abuse (II)

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## SPOUSAL ABUSE

Battery or spousal violence is defined as the threat and use of emotional, psychological, physical and sexual abuse. The goal of such behaviour includes forcing the partner to obey or do things she may not want to. Marital battery is often used by the abuser to stay in control of their relationships.

Emotional and psychological abuse is more subtle than physical abuse where the abuser continually denigrates and damages the spouse's feelings through putting her down, playing mind games, making her think she's crazy, name-calling, cursing and acts of humiliation. It includes: controlling what she does, who she sees and talks to, limiting her use of the phone and what she reads, using jealousy to justify actions.

Sexual abuse is any form of unwanted or disrespectful touching or any non-consenting sexual act or behaviour. Examples are: physically attacking parts of her body or forcing sexual activity when she says no or is too afraid to say no such as asking her to be sexual after an incident of battering.

## Prepare A Protection Plan

Together with the patient, prepare a plan of action which would give her confidence to deal with the problem. If the patient is already at serious risk of further abuse, she needs to evacuate to a refuge for battered women or shelter at some other place of safety such as a relative or friend's home.

If she needs to get there in a hurry, she should have ready a small pack consisting of her identification papers/passport, some cash, a change of clothes, a set of house/car keys, and a list of phone numbers she can call and names and addresses of places of safety.

## Taking Legal Action

The law starts from the proposition that no one should abuse another person, whether or not she is married to the abuser. If the victim is willing to make a police report and has not undergone medical examination, the police will send her to the hospital for the medical check-up. Her wounds will be treated and the extent of her medical injuries will be carefully recorded by the general practitioner or the outpatient department of any hospital.

Once she has gone through the medical examination, she can file an official complaint at the Family Court and apply for a court order. Under the existing law, the Family Court judge can issue a personal protection order, an expedited order or exclude the violent spouse from their home (also known as a domestic exclusion order). The patient must be able to prove to the judge that her partner has been violent and that the risk to her safety and protection requires that she obtains such an order.

A personal protection order (PPO) is an order from the court to the violent spouse not to repeat the physical violence. In most cases, the court order serves to restrain the abuser from further abuse. If he breaches the protection order, the court has the power to punish the errant spouse.

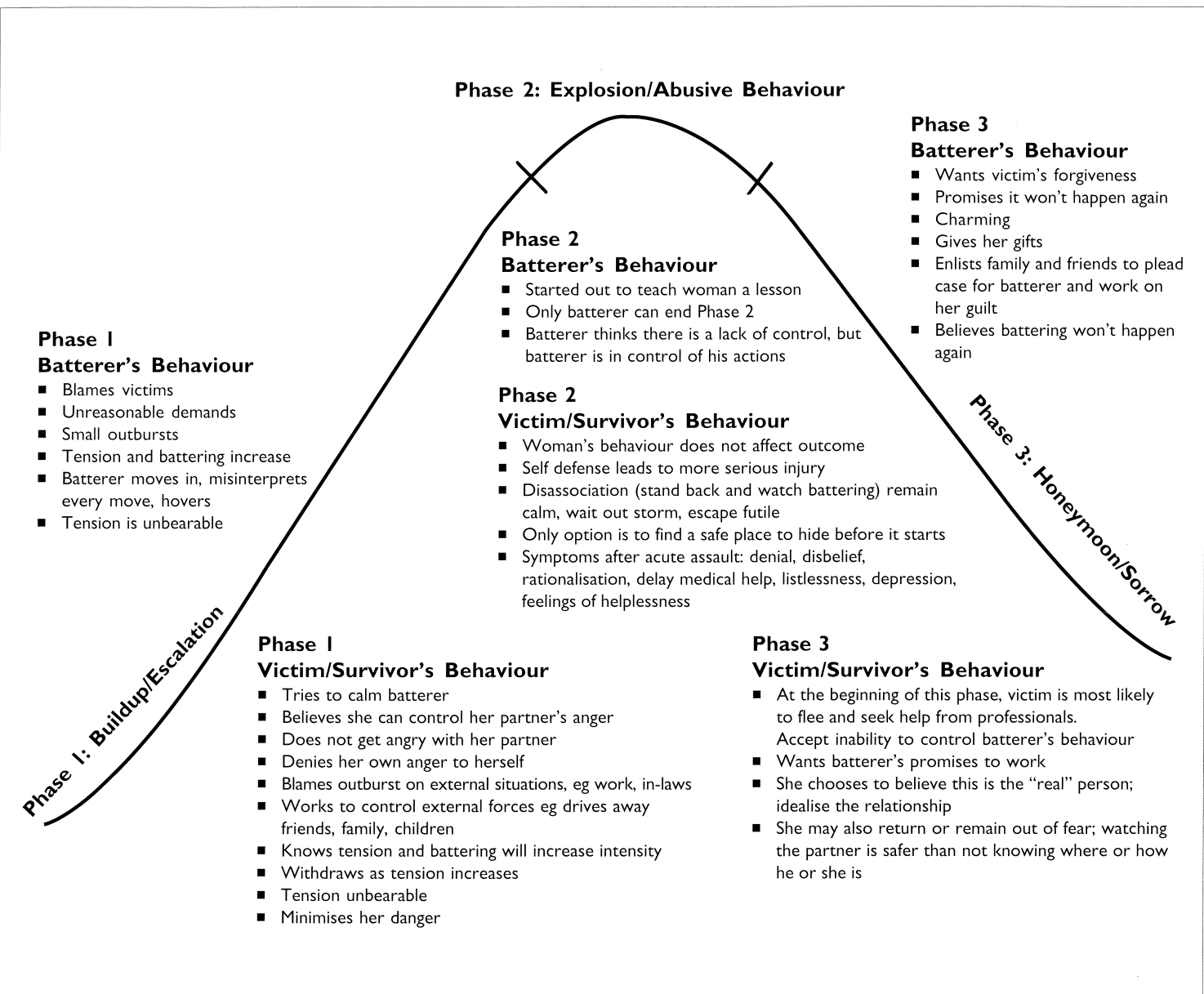
After hearing the victim's complaint, if the risk to her safety is imminent, the judge can expedite the legal process and grant an expedited order (EO). This interim order is valid for 28 days after which the abuser has a chance to appear before the judge to tell his side of the story. After listening to both sides, the judge can decide whether it is necessary to continue with the PPO, or when necessary, to attach the power of arrest to the PPO. This empowers a police officer to arrest the offending party the next time he abuses the victim. This can take place without the police officer having to receive a warrant of arrest from the courts.

If the abuser has been extremely violent, and the PPO is insufficient, an Exclusion Order (DEO) can be granted to prevent the spouse from returning home until it is safe for the victim.

The Women's Charter (Amendment) Bill, when passed by Parliament, will strengthen the existing powers of protection. The Family Court Judge will then be allowed to issue a PPO when the victim can prove that she has suffered physical or emotional abuse (referred to as "continual harassment"). The Court can then also:

- include an order to give the protected spouse the right to exclusive occupation of a shared residence or part of such a residence;
- refer the abusive spouse to counselling; and
- give any other appropriate order.

If the spouse breaches any of these orders, he has committed an offence and can be punished with a fine of \$2,000 or 6 months' imprisonment or both.



Subsequent breaches of the orders will result in an even heavier punishment. The new law does not apply only to the spouse and children but also includes protection for a former spouse, a sibling, a parent, parents-in-law, a relative or an incapacitated person who is a member of the family.

### CONCLUSION

People can sympathise with a woman who is trapped in a battering situation by economic dependence or threats against her family. But most have a hard time understanding why she must stay when she is not so financially trapped. In fact, they turn their anger and distrust against the victim and not the batterer. Here, we must delve more deeply in our own understanding of how the batterer and the victim's own life experience has driven into her the message that she deserves to be beaten.

Feeling powerless is not a character defect but the result of having power systematically taken away. The pattern of blaming the victim is an essential part

of all oppressions. It is easier to assume that there is something wrong with the victim than to learn what is wrong with the system.

To end the collusion between frontline professionals and family violence, we need to redirect the focus from the question, "Why do the victims stay?", to the question "Why does the battering continue? How can we make the abuser stop?". If a police officer simply tells the abuser to "cool off", he experiences no consequence to the battering.

Since the vast majority of abused women and children do not check into crisis centres, agencies which are more accessible such as hospitals and the neighbourhood police post will see far more battered women and children. As frontline professionals, we need to work with the entire range of mental health agencies – shelters, hotlines, police, criminal justice systems and medical services – and the larger community to end violence against women. Below are help numbers and addresses you can refer your patients to:

## WHERE TO GET HELP

### TEMPORARY SHELTERS

Exec. Director  
**Elliot Road Care Centre**  
1, Elliot Road (458686)  
Tel: 241 0936

Sister-in-Charge  
**Marymount Hostel**  
790 Thomson Road (298142)  
Tel: 352 0181

Sister-in-Charge  
**Good Shepherd Crisis Centre**  
Tel: 755 6496

Counsellor  
**Kallang Care Centre**  
130 Mountbatten Road (397994)  
Tel: 346 5459.

Supervisor  
**Haven Young Women's Hostel**  
350 Pasir Panjang Road (118692)  
Tel: 778 7350

Ag. Administrator  
**Pertapis Centre for Women and Girls**  
No. 1, Geylang Lor. 23 (388352)  
Tel: 745 3969

### FAMILY COUNSELLING SERVICES

**Ang Mo Kio FSC**  
Tel: 453 5349

**Bt. Ho Swee Social Service Centre**  
Tel: 274 2646

**Association of Muslim Professionals**  
Tel: 346 0911

**Kampong Kapor FSC**  
Tel: 299 7662

**S'pore Indian Development  
Association (SINDA) FSC**  
Tel: 294 0155

**Counselling and Care Centre**  
Tel: 536 6366

**Care Corner FSC**  
Tel: 476 1481 (Queenstown)  
Tel: 356 1622 (Toa Payoh)

**Help Every Lone Parent FSC**  
Tel: 457 5188

**Lakeside Family Centre**  
Tel: 567 1908

**Shan You Counselling Centre**  
Tel: 741 9293

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### HOTLINES

**Police: 999**

**Samaritans of Singapore**  
Tel: 1800-221 4444

**Hotline 800 – Mandarin**  
(10am to 10pm)  
1-800-353-5800

**Agape Hotline – Mandarin**  
(9am to 6pm Mon to Fri)  
1-800-583-6676

**Lord's Family Life Centre – Tamil Speaking**  
(10am to 5pm Mon to Fri)  
Tel: 339 3923

**Family Life Society (24 hours)**  
Tel: 339 9770 / 339 6200

**Association of Muslim Professionals**  
(2pm to 7pm Mon to Fri)  
Tel: 345 2911

### LEGAL ASSISTANCE

Singapore Association of Women Lawyers  
Tel: 224 3405

Syariah Court  
Tel: 1-800-258-5378

Legal Aid Bureau  
Tel: 336 1203

**TOUCH Legal Care**  
Tel: 440 3141