

## Guide 2 Annex 5: Domestic violence



A major issue that may be overlooked in NTDs is domestic violence. Domestic violence severely affects a person's mental wellbeing and can be a barrier and disruption in treatment compliance and self-care. It can be from spouses but can also be from children and in-laws. Despite the link between domestic violence and mental ill health, mental health professionals don't always recognise the issue of abuse and may therefore be unaware of it. In addition, some people who experience domestic violence don't expect to be believed and may hide it.

It is important for health workers to be aware of the possibility of domestic violence. They need to be aware that people will often tell their experience of violence only when they are asked. Some may not even realise they are in an abusive situation, as in a cultural setting it may be 'normal'. It is important to be gentle when asking about abuse. Avoid direct questions such as 'Have you been abused by your spouse or anyone?'; instead, ask behaviour-specific questions, such as:

- Have you been injured in a conflict at home?
- Does anyone shout at you?
- What hinders you from coming to the hospital?

Violence and abuse can be physical, verbal, emotional and sexual, and all these types of abuse have a damaging effect on mental wellbeing. It is important to acknowledge and to help the person affected air the following feelings:

- Feelings of shame or embarrassment about these experiences.
- Self-blame and guilt, thinking they are responsible for the abuse.
- Fear of recurrent abuse.
- Fear of being judged and hesitation to ask for help.

The following can be done to help people who experience or have experienced violence or abuse:

- Encourage them to find friends with whom they can share their experiences.
- Ask them to include 'supporters' (e.g., children, siblings, parents) in psychosocial support.
- Ask them to invite the victimisers for counselling if they are willing.
- Train them on assertiveness skills.

In the case of abuse, tap on their resources which have helped them to cope and face the abuse. These resources can also be used to help them face stigma.