

**Abuse thrives in isolation. This can be especially true for victims of domestic violence who are Deaf, DeafBlind or hard of hearing.**

**Like other women, women with disabilities are usually abused by someone they know, such as a partner or family member. Caregivers can withhold medicine and assistive devices, such as wheelchairs or braces. They can also refuse to help with daily needs like bathing, dressing, or eating.**

**Not only do disabled people experience higher rates of domestic abuse, they also experience more barriers to accessing support, such as health and social care services and domestic abuse services.**

**It is important to recognise the complex relationships between women with disabilities and the people who provide their personal care. The fear of not having basic physical needs met when assistance is not provided *is* identified as a powerful method by which people with disabilities have been victimised. The power dynamics and resolution of subsequent abuse may become more difficult or confusing if the caregiver is also a family member or intimate partner. This increases the chance the abuse will remain hidden because of fears of losing the relationship or fear of being institutionalised.**

**Anybody who experiences domestic abuse may face broader risk factors, but disabled people face specific risks. They are often in particularly vulnerable circumstances that may reduce their ability to defend themselves, or to recognise, report and escape abuse. Impairment can create social isolation, which, along with the need for assistance with health and care and the potential increased situational vulnerabilities, raises the risk of domestic abuse for disabled people. Physical and environment inaccessibility, stigma and discrimination can also exclude and isolate them. Their reliance on care increases the situational vulnerability to other people's controlling behaviour and can exacerbate difficulties in leaving an abusive situation.**

**Significant differences exist between genders in experiences of domestic abuse. While men are at risk of, and do experience, domestic abuse, women experience more repeated physical violence, more severe violence, much more sexual violence, more coercive control, more injuries and more fear of their partner.**

**The differences between genders in experiences of domestic abuse are similar among disabled people. Disabled women are significantly more likely to experience domestic abuse than disabled men and experience more frequent and more severe domestic abuse than disabled men. However, as being disabled carries further risk of domestic abuse, disabled men also experience higher rates of abuse than non-disabled men. Disabled men experience a similar rate of domestic abuse as non-disabled women.**

**Many men who experience domestic abuse from a current or former partner find it difficult to get support; not least because it can be hard for men to acknowledge and discuss their experiences. This can be due to any number of reasons, including love for a partner, embarrassment or shame and concern for any children, or simply not knowing where to go.**

**There is a higher risk of violence more for disabled people:**

- **more than one in three people with mental illness have experiencing domestic abuse in the past year, one in 20 people with mental illness have experienced sexual violence in the past year**
- **people with mental illness were almost four times more likely to experience violence in the past year**
- **people with an intellectual disability were 1.6 times more likely to experience violence in the past year**
- **men with post-traumatic stress disorder are over seven times more likely to experience domestic abuse**
- **women with anxiety disorder are over four times more likely to experience domestic abuse**
- **women with depressive disorder are over two times more likely than women without a mental illness to experience domestic abuse**

**Male victims may try different techniques to cope, including adopting an 'I can handle this' attitude and adapting their behaviour to appease the abuser. Coping strategies like this may make life temporarily safer and easier but they are unlikely to stop the abuse.**

**Honour based violence is not a crime which is perpetrated by men only, sometimes female relatives will support, incite or assist. It is also not unusual for younger relatives to be selected to undertake the abuse as a way to protect senior members of the family. Sometimes contract killers and bounty hunters will also be employed.**

**Males can also be victims of Honour Based Violence, sometimes as a consequence of a relationship which is deemed to be inappropriate, if they are gay, have a disability or if they have assisted a victim.**

**Most male perpetrators of domestic abuse who access help from their GP's will state they have problems with stress, anger, depression or alcohol. They maybe one of your "frequent flyers" who attend with various non-specific health concerns. Rarely will they admit they are abusive without sensitive but direct exploration.**

**“We’re also seeing a real trend of gay men who are HIV-positive and their HIV status being used as a form of control. Either through threatening to reveal their HIV status or their partner withholding medication. This also occurs with partners of trans people withholding their hormone treatment.”**

**Most victims of elder abuse are older women with a chronic illness or disability. Again, the most typical abusers are partners, adult children, or family members.**

- 500,000 women are believed to be abused at any one time in the UK**
- Half of the people who abuse are related to the person they are abusing, but very rarely (in only 1 per cent of cases) is the abuser the main family carer.**
- 53% of those who abuse are sons or daughters.**
- Those between 80-89 years old are the most vulnerable to abuse.**
- Two-thirds of abuse is committed at home, by someone in a position of trust.**

**Compared to the general population, men and women with severe mental illness experience a substantially increased risk of domestic and sexual violence, as well as higher prevalence of family violence and adverse health impact**

***“A police officers said to me,  
‘You used to be a bloke once;  
why didn’t you give him a slap  
back?’”***

***“How do you tell anyone you are living  
in fear from your partner if no one  
knows you’re gay? I hid it like I hid my  
depression and anxiety. I had nobody to  
talk to, so I thought maybe this is what  
I’ve got to put up with. It wasn’t long  
before I was hospitalised”.***

***“ I never took money out of the cashpoint without telling him first. Not once in the fifteen years we were together. No point in asking for trouble”.***

***“You finally say, ‘Okay this is it. I’m going to do whatever I can to change this marriage.’ And by the way, can you bring my scooter to me so I can leave you?”***

***“I always dreamed that someday, when our children grew up and left home, I would leave my husband, but I never thought about my own aging and increasing frailty. Now I am too ill to leave and I am trapped”.***

*“When you're in an abusive relationship for a long time, you lose your identity. You believe in the lies you are told. I am disabled, and he insisted on doing everything for me, so I lost my belief in my ability to live an independent life too”.*

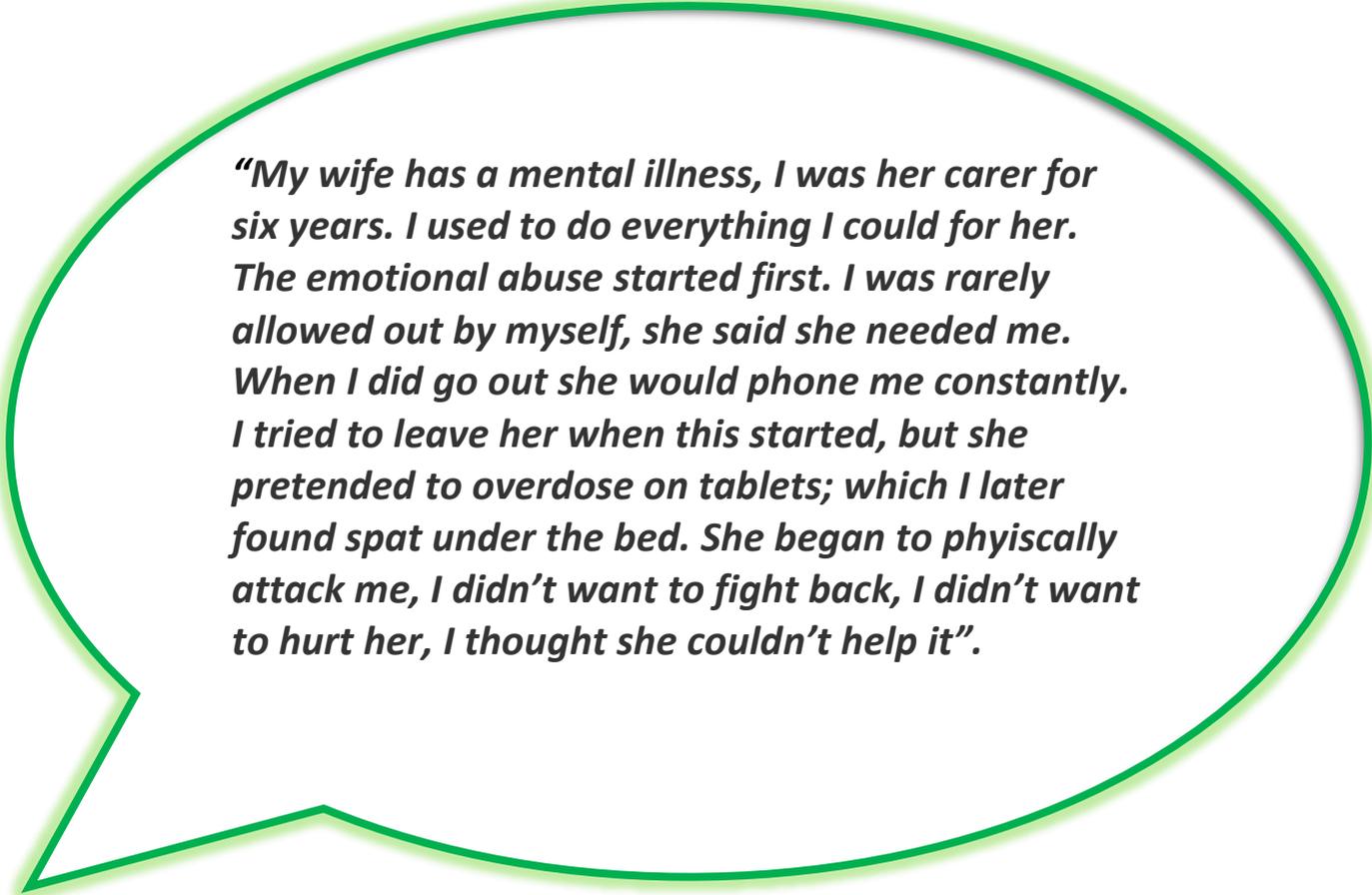
*“My husband used to hold me against the wall by my throat and twist my arm. I didn't want to acknowledge that this was abuse. He became more physically violent towards me, hitting me and bashing me against the wall. I put up with this for 36 years and eventually walked out at the age of 60 and sought help. When I walked out I didn't know who I was. I genuinely believed what my husband kept telling me, that I was worthless and useless and wouldn't be able to cope with life without him”.*

*"I hear people say "just leave" and they cannot understand why you can't walk out that door. But what they don't realise is that when you look outside of that front door, it is black. You can't see any light at the end of the tunnel, you don't know what's going to happen to you".*

*"I am deaf and I use a wheelchair. My husband looks after me. He controls the money. He helps me get dressed, but he makes me wait, sometimes just in my pants, waiting for my clothes. If I fall from my chair my husband doesn't tell my carers, he makes me deal with it. He doesn't take me to the doctor or the hospital. When I am getting in the car he will push me half in and I have to do the rest. My husband used to sign for me all the time, he doesn't bother now, he says he has forgotten, I feel so isolated".*

*“Then keys would go missing and other little things like that, so I started to feel quite unsteady and unstable and always blaming myself, he told me it was my illness again. He became very jealous and obsessive and accusatory if I got a phone call from anyone, he was critical of my friends, my family, and in the end he didn't want me to see any of my friends so I was isolated. I didn't know if I was coming or going. I thought I was going mad, I didn't want to be ill again. I kept thinking right up until the point where he actually tried to smother me that it would get better”.*

*“She'd told me that if the police turned up to tell them that I'd been attacked due to gambling debts, which is what I did, but the officer, who saw I also had many old injuries, took me outside to the police van. He said, 'Is the person who hurt you still inside your house?' 'I whispered 'Yes' and then collapsed. I couldn't believe it was all over.”*



*“My wife has a mental illness, I was her carer for six years. I used to do everything I could for her. The emotional abuse started first. I was rarely allowed out by myself, she said she needed me. When I did go out she would phone me constantly. I tried to leave her when this started, but she pretended to overdose on tablets; which I later found spat under the bed. She began to physically attack me, I didn’t want to fight back, I didn’t want to hurt her, I thought she couldn’t help it”.*