

## This page was printed from 938LIVE

Title: Choose love, not abuse

Date: 6th February 2009

URL: [http://938live.sg:80/portal/site/938Live /menuitem.772b6c230fcad6770c5e4a10618000a0?vnextoid=bd9ca0b61494f110VgnVCM1000\\_001f0aa8c0RCRD&vnextfmt=printer&mcParam =](http://938live.sg:80/portal/site/938Live /menuitem.772b6c230fcad6770c5e4a10618000a0?vnextoid=bd9ca0b61494f110VgnVCM1000_001f0aa8c0RCRD&vnextfmt=printer&mcParam =)

Dating violence happens when a partner uses force or pressure to abuse the other partner sexually, physically or psychologically in a dating relationship.

And the frequency and severity of the abuse usually increases as the relationship continues.

Worryingly, the Centre for Promoting Alternatives to Violence or PAVE has cited dating violence as a new trend of abuse in Singapore.

*Jeremy Koh* tells us more about this lethal trend.

19-year-old polytechnic student Cynthia was hit five times in her two years together with her ex-boyfriend, John.

She had known him while working during her school vacation.

Cynthia says John, who's two years older than her, was very nice when the relationship just started.

"We started out having a lot of things to share with each other, and he was very nice, very sweet."

But after slightly more than half a year into their relationship, John got abusive.

"We got to work that day and I was replacing him for work and I couldn't contact him. And after work, I dropped by his place to see what's happening and I remember that evening, he is very drunk, and he wanted sex. So I didn't want. So we sort of argued and after that he got angry, and slapped me. That was the very first time."

Though upset, Cynthia put the incident behind her after he apologised profusely.

"I took into consideration that he was drunk, and then after that he explained to me and everything, so I sort of forgave him."

But a few months later, the abuse happened again, and this time, John wasn't drunk.

"This guy is like going after me, and he got possessive and wanted me to break out the friendship with him, but I didn't want to sacrifice the friendship, especially so when he's a very good friend of mine. So there was a major argument, shouting, and then he slapped me. I remember that incident left me with a cut on my forehead, slightly above my eyebrow, and took me two weeks to recover."

After his apology, she forgave him once again, and the cycle repeated itself for the next year or so.

And to hide the abuse from her parents, Cynthia resorted to using heavy makeup to cover up her injuries.

Then came the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back.

"I got a birthday present, and he got really angry because it's given by a guy and he slapped me and I got a bump on my head, and it left a scar on the left side of my cheek, and it took a month to get rid of the scar."

So why was this the trigger for the break-up?

Cynthia explains.

"The last incident really felt horrible, and that was the time where I feel the pain is unbearable, the emotional pain, and then you felt disappointed and devastated at the same time. And then it just felt like dying. You feel like you rather die than lead such a life everytime it happens.

But while Cynthia was lucky, or rather determined enough to get out of the abusive relationship, there are many others who remain trapped.

And these are the people whom PAVe wants to reach out to.

Specifically, it wants people to know that any form of violence in a relationship should not be condoned.

PAVe's Head of Family Development, Seah Kheng Yeow.

"We want to help the victim to see that love doesn't mean the person will have to do all these to you. And so the person needs to recognise that and make a stand, if you love me, you don't have to do this to me. So what we want the victim to do is: talk to a person if they're unsure, to an adult, can be a friend, parents, any person they can confide in. And of course if they're in doubt, they can always speak to a professional like a counsellor."

To raise awareness on dating violence, PAVe, together with a group of Nanyang Technological University students, is organising a dating violence awareness week which starts tomorrow.

It came after social workers at PAVe noticed quite a number of couples in abusive marriages.

"In our cases that we were counselling for spousal abuse, a lot of times when we do our history taking, we notice that there was dating violence happening in their relationship before marriage, but they chose to still get married and now it escalates. So that's where we feel this is a worrying trend, and that's where we want to address this topic of dating violence."

Ms Seah also explains why victims sometimes find it hard to walk away from an abusive relationship.

"Sometimes there's a lot of threats, a lot of fears, and of course we also have the love element where they feel that they love the partner so much and the partner usually goes through the cycle of violence we see in a dating relationship because after they abuse, they apologise, and to the partner, the victim, she sees that the man is not all that bad. He's also very caring, most of the time, and there's always a wanting to give them a second chance."

But beyond the physical aspects, the emotional pain of an abusive relationship usually cuts deeper into victims.

Cynthia again.

"I do have nightmares on what happened, and you just suddenly wake up in the middle of the night, but it's not an everyday thing.. You'll have nightmare of him slapping you and sometimes even more exaggerated stuff that never happened, like maybe him taking a knife towards you that kind of thing. I still have got a phobia. When people raise their hands, I can still remember how he slapped me."

And that is why Ms Seah is urging victims to seek help early.

"For some severe cases, it leads to depression and loss of appetite and things like that. That's why we want people to come out to ask for help as early as possible so it'll not lead to long term trauma or effect on them."

And finally, Ms Seah has this message for those who remain in an abusive relationship.

"Break the violence and break the cycle. You don't deserve to be a victim of violence, because a lot of times some of the victims think that it's also their fault - if I had not done this, my boyfriend probably will not be angry, and would not have hit me, so I think they don't deserve to be a victim."