Date violence: Breaking the cycle

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THE first time he slapped her, she was half drunk. She had refused him sex when he asked for it six months into their relationship. Though upset, Cynthia, 18, put the incident behind her after he apologised profusely.

Over their two years together, she was hit five times — once, it left a bump on her forehead and a cut on her cheek, which she disguised with heavy makeup. Each time, her 20-year-old boyfriend would go out of his way to make it up to her.

“He would cook for me, get me gastric medicine — maybe that’s one reason that kept me going,” she said.

With more cases like Cynthia’s out there, this Saturday, the first Dating Violence Awareness Week will be launched here — the joint effort of a group of media students from Nanyang Technological University and the Centre for Promoting Alternatives to Violence (PAVe).

Dating couples may not be bound by marriage or a shared home, but the reasons many stay in a violent relationship are similar to those given by abused spouses.

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Breaking that cycle of violence

Said PAVe’s head of family development, Ms Seah Kheng Yeow: “They have invested a lot (of time and effort) into the relationship. Some of them think that the cycle of violence is normal — that obsessive jealousy is love, that pain, fear and sorrow are normal.

“Sometimes, a person tries to stay in a relationship in a bid to help the abuser, or hoping that the person can change, often putting the needs of others over theirs.”

Emotions take precedence over rationality, for victims of violence. For example, Cynthia knew her friends were right when they told her to break off the relationship, but “it was easier said than done”.

Another form of emotional investment is sexual intimacy.

“There are some couples who, after being sexually intimate, feel they cannot find true love after breaking up,” said Ms Seah.

In other cases, it is blackmail — such as the abusive partner threatening to distribute nude photos.

The incidence of dating violence is not well-documented in Singapore. However, PAVe found in 2003 that out of 2,200 secondary and junior college students polled, 15 to 30 per cent had encountered family or dating violence.

Ms Seah advises those who are experiencing or know of someone in a violent relationship to speak to a counsellor or social worker. If not, “talk to an adult, someone you can trust or even your friends — don’t keep it to yourself”.

“Know that you can break the cycle of violence and you don’t have to be a victim,” she added.

The week-long awareness campaign is targeted at youths aged 17 to 25 and will highlight the four aspects of dating violence: Emotional, psychological, sexual and physical abuse.

The organisers will visit schools to talk to students. Badges, brochures and flyers can also be found at the Body Shop and other retail outlets, to highlight dating violence to the wider community.

SIGNS OF DATING VIOLENCE

Emotional Abuse
• You are afraid of your partner
• You are subjected to public humiliation by your partner

Psychological Abuse
• Your partner threatens to use violence against you or to commit suicide

Sexual Abuse
• You are forced to have sex with your partner when you do not consent.

Physical Abuse
• Your partner pushes, punches, kicks or hursts things at you

Controlling behaviour
• Your partner insists on knowing where and what you are doing all the time
• Isolates you from family and friends

For more information, call the PAVe hotline at 6555 0390, or visit www.chooselovenotabuse.com.