

## *A Hidden Secret In the church today!*

### *Abuse happens everywhere.*

You may not just be aware of it!

Abuse lurks in every culture, in every society, in every sphere of life. Abuse happens to the rich and the poor, the young and the old. It happens regardless of colour, shape or size. It happens in every religion and faith. It happens to children, women and men.

Abuse alters a life. It affects what we believe, how we think about ourselves, others and the world around us.

Simply put abuse is:

Destructive power and control over another person in one or several of the following ways.

Verbally, emotionally, psychologically, physically, sexually, financially and spiritually.

Victims of abuse need special help to overcome their victim mentality and the various coping skills they acquired to survive; often since childhood. Abusers require specialized help and counselling to overcome their addiction to power and control. Not all counsellors are trained to specifically deal with these issues.

There are various reasons why people abuse and they are usually not what we think or who you may think.

Abuse is not a one time incident. It is a cycle that repeats itself again and again. It is a cycle of tension, eruption and calm (often known as the honeymoon phase). The cycle usually becomes more frequent and intense over time.

It is estimated that 1 in 4 women are abused. That is not to say that men aren't but they are not the majority.

Unfortunately these women and sometimes men sit in our church 'pews'.

Sitting in your midst might be a woman who keeps her secret well-hidden because she is SO ashamed and full of fear to admit what is happening. Being a Christian adds to her shame and fear. At first, she may not even recognize the abuse herself. Then there is denial, minimizing, excusing and protecting her abuser that can go on in her mind. It takes A LOT of courage to come out and tell someone. And if there is physical abuse it takes several incidents before a woman calls the police if she even does at all. And even with a call fear usually enters and police are not always helpful. So often nothing happens except the abuse escalates often in other ways.

So when someone tells you they are in an abusive relationship PLEASE

- BELIEVE them.
- LISTEN to them without judgment or criticism.
- DON'T blame the victim.
- Make sure they are SAFE.
- Suggest they get PROPER\_support and help.

If it is an abusive marriage relationship

- Please be more concerned about the individuals in the marriage than the institute.
- Do not suggest marriage counselling.
- Realize that sometimes separation is necessary for the safety and sanity of a partner.
- Change is not a quick fix and reconciliation is not a simple matter.

When someone who has had the courage to open up and share this issue with you, **YOUR RESPONSE IS CRITICAL**. It can either be helpful and healing or hurtful and harming.

**MAKE A HEALING CHOICE!**

**Let's make the church a Safe Place.**

**By Monica Di Francesco**