

Theory of Abuse

Function of Power and Control

The Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Duluth Minnesota asserts the power and control model. Ellen Pense, the founder of the project, created in collaboration with the abused women, a model based on the power and control wheel which describes the systematic use of tactics utilized by abusers with the intent to exercise control. She states that men who abuse their partners shift tactics according to what they believe will work in a given situation, the mood they are in and the response they are looking for from their partner, thus confirming the intentional nature of the abuse. She states further that the abuser employs tactics not only to gain their partner's submission to a specific demand, but also to establish a relationship that he can rely upon in the future. These tactics appear to be random and unexplainable, but in the context of attempting to establish power in a relationship, random acts of violence are fully explainable. In addition, this model purports that the abuse a woman is subjected to is not only personal abuse. She suggests that the personal abuse is supported and perpetrated by institutions. For example: the justice system which does not take the crime of woman abuse seriously, the medical profession that treats it as an individual problem, the government that continues to cut necessary resources for women seeking safety for themselves and their children. These institutions are fuelled by the cultural messages that say women must obey their husbands, every child needs a father, a man is king of his castle.

The London Abused Women's Centre (LAWC) supports the power and control model because we believe that it most accurately describes the situations which women share with us daily. Our feminist analysis gives rise to an understanding of the interconnection between patriarchal structures and violence against women and children. Further, it is understood that this oppression may be exerted through individual, institutional and/or cultural contexts. We believe further that:

- men are in a social position to abuse power and control and currently not held sufficiently responsible for such abuse;
- in a society dominated by men, women and children are vulnerable to abuse and have few actual or perceived options to ensure their personal safety; and,
- that the interlocking nature of sexism and other forms of oppression (racism, ageism, ableism) add further barriers for women seeking safety for themselves and their children.