

BREAK — THE — CYCLE

A **GUIDE** ON SPEAKING UP
WHEN EXPERIENCING
INTIMATE PARTNER
VIOLENCE



Chinwe Enyinna

Break The Cycle

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Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

According to World Health Organisation (WHO), IPV is one of the most common violence against women.

It is a behaviour by an intimate partner or ex-partner that causes physical, sexual, or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse, and controlling behaviours. Women can also be violent in relationships with men. However, men are more likely to experience violent acts by strangers or acquaintances than by someone close to them.

According to a World Health Organisation (WHO) multi-country study among women of reproductive age, the overall prevalence of IPV reveals that it is most prominent in developing countries where socio-economic status is low and education is limited, especially in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) countries. Worldwide, almost 27% of women aged 15-49 years report that they have been subjected to some form of physical, and or sexual violence by their intimate partner. One in three women are affected throughout their lifetime.

Speaking up about Intimate Partner Violence is exceedingly difficult for victims across the world, especially in developing countries. For example, in many African countries, there is little or no support because male domination is engraved into the culture. Few African women are beginning to speak up, but we need more women speaking up to break this cycle.

Speaking up about Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is considered a very sensitive subject. African women face many barriers that hinder them from speaking up when they find themselves in abusive relationships. Such barriers include fear of stigma and shame, lack of finance, lack of awareness of available services, lack of action by law enforcement, misconceptions and attitudes surrounding violence as a normal component

of relationship with the perceived belief that *you will benefit from marriage later if you endure today.*

Every relationship goes through difficult and turbulent times, but the difference between a difficult time in a relationship and an abusive relationship should be distinguished.

Speaking up is very difficult for victims of IPV. However, it is the first step needed to break the cycle of Intimate Partner Violence.

A Guide to Speaking Up About Intimate Partner Violence

1. Have A Conversation with Yourself.

The most important conversations are the ones you have with yourself. Be honest with yourself about everything going on in the relationship.

- Is there an increase in accusations, criticisms, demands, blame, etc?
- Are you physically, emotionally, financially, or sexually abused?
- Are you being valued, loved, and respected by your partner?
- Is what you are experiencing a mere misunderstanding, or is this much more toxic?
- Do you have feelings of regret and wonder how you got there in the first place?
- Does this all feel like a dream, and you do not know what to do next?
- Are you confused if this is love or abuse?

If it does not feel right, it is time to SPEAK UP to BREAK THE CYCLE!

2. Acknowledge Your Situation.

Change what you can. Identify what you cannot change.

It can be extremely difficult to come to terms that you are experiencing abuse in your relationship. Sometimes one can live in denial, but it is important to **accept the situation** for what it is so that you can understand how best to tackle it. However, physical abuse needs immediate intervention, and it is too toxic to salvage. You need lots of courage at this point.

3. Have A Conversation with Your Partner.

This conversation should not be confrontational to avoid creating a dangerous environment for yourself. Speak to your partner about how you are feeling. There are occasions where your partner may not even be aware that their behaviour is abusive to you. Talk about it and resist the urge to sweep it under the carpet. It is important to express the way you feel to your partner so they can understand their toxic patterns. Fixing toxic relationships is not an easy task but is possible with hard work from both parties.

4. Have A Safety Plan

If things are not improving even after the conversation with your partner, then it is time to have a safety plan. **You should not take responsibility for a badly behaved partner**, and you should not feel guilty about this. Having safety plans is one subject that is not discussed as much in many African countries, but it is important. If you live together, where will you stay while you deal with all that is going on in the relationship? If he is the breadwinner, how will you manage financially in the meantime? If you have children together, what is the plan for them etc.

5. Seek Support

This is a very fragile time, especially for those living in developing countries like Africa where marriage is seen as *the pride of the woman*. Sharing your experience and seeking support can be daunting. You do not know who to share your story with. This period comes with a lot of feelings of being more concerned about painting the picture-perfect relationship before friends and family.

- being worried about the things that could go wrong if the relationship breaks down.
- worrying about what family, friends, and society would say if they found out that your relationship is going through a challenging time.

All these are valid points, but you should confide in people you trust especially family and professional counsellors. You would not know how supportive they are until you try.

I had the opportunity of speaking to survivors of IPV and many could not over-emphasize the importance of confiding in family and how it helped them through their journey. This does not mean there are not the odd ones who find themselves in families who wouldn't want them to speak up about abuse because for them the family name is more important than the abuse suffered. Some African families consider a woman as being disrespectful and unsubmitive when she speaks up about her marital challenges.

If you do not have a supportive family, then confide in a trusted friend, or professional counsellor or find a community of like minds. You can also reach out to organizations providing support for IPV survivors in your locality or country.

6. Counselling

Counselling gives you a safe confidential space to talk about your feelings and concerns. A counsellor can help you express and deal with upsetting feelings, issues, and problems. Counselling also helps in the healing process. However, attending counselling together with an abusive partner is not recommended because there are risks associated with it. Attending counselling with your partner can help both parties understand each other and resolve difficult problems but not beneficial in an abusive relationship.

7. Connecting With the Supernatural.

If you are confused and looking for someone to talk to, connecting with whoever or whatever you believe in can be beneficial at this point. Connecting with the supernatural or spirituality is about seeking a meaningful connection with something bigger than yourself. This practice has a way of *building back your confidence, strength, self-worth, and hope for the future*. Being in an abusive relationship can be very traumatic and can destroy your self-esteem.

I remember my own experience; *I was lost* and consistently spoke to God. A verse in the bible dropped in my heart and that became an anchor scripture for me. My confidence and strength were renewed daily as I navigated that challenging time in my life.

8. Take A Break If Required.

It is okay to take a break while you both work together to sort out the differences in the relationship.

It is okay to try a period of separation before making the decision of whether to choose reconciliation or not.

There are situations in which an abuser can change through a commitment to getting individualized therapy and doing the work required to make lasting changes that do not involve violence. Making a promise never to do it again is not enough. An IPV abuser can change with intervention, but the process can be difficult and requires significant time and effort.

If you or anyone you know is experiencing IPV, you are not alone, and support is available.

I invite you to follow me on chinny_68 on Instagram and Chinwe Enyinna on Facebook.

Please sign up to receive my monthly newsletters via my email
hello@chinweenyinna.com

About the Author



Chinwe Enyinna, MPH, BSN is an emerging public health professional with over 7 years of experience in gender and gender-based violence (GBV) advocacy, primary health care, and adult nursing in Nigeria and the United Kingdom.

She is passionate about tackling inequalities and contributing to a sustainable and fair world. She has spoken on women's empowerment, women's participation in politics, and tackling violence against women and girls on various platforms. She has also published articles on the prevention of Gender Based Violence (GBV) on various platforms.

Chinwe is actively engaged in local advocacy campaigns for domestic abuse survivors which led her to establish "The Survivor Hub", a non-profit organisation in Nigeria which raises awareness of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and supports survivors to seek help, heal and rebuild their lives. She

is an IPV survivor and envisages a world where no other woman must endure Intimate Partner Violence.

Email: hello@chinweenyinna.com