



# WomenSV

## Why would women in affluent neighborhoods need help?

In general, it may seem that women in middle-to-upper income areas need no help, even if they are experiencing abuse. After all, they have money, connections, resources. They live in nice neighborhoods. They should be able to handle it themselves, right?

*"Why would I want to help those women when there are so many other people who really need help?"*

For our friends and colleagues blessed with powerful, successful partners who are loving, respectful and kind (and we have many on our board and amongst our volunteers!), we hope to create a deeper understanding that abuse is devastating to every woman and child, regardless of income level...

Why do we tend to think that just because someone comes from a nice neighborhood, they shouldn't need help dealing with domestic violence? Isn't it a bit like saying they shouldn't ever need to call the police either? Homes get broken into in every neighborhood. People get assaulted in every neighborhood. Domestic violence is a crime, and it happens in every neighborhood.

Pain, terror, suffering, lethality risk are the same no matter what neighborhood we come from. But the more money, status and power an abuser has, the more tools he has at his disposal to coerce and control, the harder it becomes to leave, and the easier it becomes to hide the abuse.

Beautiful homes on big properties are idyllic with a partner who loves and respects you. But they take on a different character when there is abuse. As a number of WomenSV survivors have said, "There are places that don't have cell phone coverage. And there is no one there to hear you scream."

Children become the ultimate hidden victims of abuse in every neighborhood, rich or poor--doomed to bear silent witness and at risk for repeating what they have seen.

*Who speaks for them?*

In terms of financial resources, women's abusive partners have very often taken total control of the joint finances, forced them to sign restrictive pre-and-post-nuptial agreements, and taken very effective measures to destroy their credit, career, social network, reputation. Most survivors have had their lives threatened. Some have had their children taken away by partners who are doctors, lawyers, engineers, CEO's. They use their public image and professional credentials to disguise a darker side that is much more threatening, frightening and ultimately devastating. With so much at stake, so much to lose, it often becomes the lesser of two evils to stay.

Many survivors in our community once lived in nice homes and have since ended up penniless, homeless, reduced to living out of their cars. These women move amongst us every day and we would never guess, because in affluent areas, that sort of thing is not supposed to happen. And if it ever does happen, it's certainly not talked about in polite society.

And that's how the abuser gets away with it. Because abuse thrives in secrecy, silence and isolation-- plus the misperception that she should be able to handle it by herself.

An even more disturbing truth: anyone can become the victim of a powerful/ charismatic/wealthy abuser. Anyone.

It could be your own sister, daughter, best friend, and you may not even know because the secret is too painful, too shameful, too risky to reveal.

As difficult as it is to live with an abuser, no matter how much money she has, it is virtually impossible to leave without outside help and support, because affluent abusers are that powerful, persuasive, and dangerous, and she is often isolated, terrorized, made to believe there is no way out.

Shame and fear keep many women silent. They are afraid to reach out and share the truth of their partner's darker side--especially if he is prominent and well-liked in the community. No one could ever guess there was a dark side revealed only behind closed doors.

Tony Harris, CNN correspondent, interviewed the Director of WomenSV for the second of 3 stories in a one-hour documentary on domestic violence that aired nationally on the Investigation Discovery Channel. *Behind Closed Doors: Shocking Secrets* put this issue on the map overnight, revealing one of our society's shameful secrets: that domestic violence happens everywhere, even in affluent communities.

It's about 20 minutes into the program. Here's the link: <https://amzn.to/2JWr9ni>

Megyn Kelly on her Megyn Kelly Today show devoted an entire show to domestic violence in the affluent community interviewing the Director of WomenSV and several WomenSV survivors: <https://on.today.com/2IFM213>

Suppose a woman *does* have financial resources: does that make her terror any less? Does it make the actual threat to her physical safety any less with a partner who will often stop at nothing to take back control--even if that includes committing the ultimate act of domestic violence, murder? Most partners of WomenSV's survivors have made this threat. Some have carried it out. Most incidents of domestic violence happen *after* a woman leaves.

One woman's husband, a physician, described in great detail how he was going to kill her in a way that not even the coroner could detect. Another mentioned casually, "Did you know there are more than 40 ways to kill a woman and make it look like she died from natural causes?"

In the hands of a powerful, sophisticated abuser, anything can be turned into a weapon: medicine, the law, therapy, technology.

And in Silicon Valley, the birthplace of new technology, we have women whose every moment is being monitored and recorded with the use of devices that border on science fiction. In the Valley, it goes way beyond hacking an unsuspecting partner's cell phone or computer. Even Barbie Dolls are "smart dolls" now and can be turned into surveillance devices. So insidious are they that they have been banned in Germany.

WomenSV is the only program in the state, and one of only a handful in the country, designed to help this invisible population, living like prisoners in their own homes, raising children at risk of repeating the cycle of violence, becoming the next generation of victims or abusers.

**In the past 7 years, WomenSV has helped over 1,000 women and done trainings for thousands of providers to help them deliver more trauma-informed services to domestic violence survivors.**

At WomenSV, women find solace and encouragement in the stories of women who have come before them. They find resources, connection, validation for their experiences. Some end up working for one another, sharing homes--doing housesitting, childcare, starting businesses together, rebuilding their credit, their careers, their lives, creating a sisterhood of survivors--strong, powerful, courageous in their determination to free themselves from abuse--for their own sake, and for the sake of their children. They learn language to put on the tactics used to manipulate, terrorize and disempower them. They learn they are not alone. They find friends, allies, connection and most importantly, *hope*.

As women in our community gather the courage to reach out for help, our aim is to continue to provide staff and programs and services to help them. With 2-3 new women reaching out for help each day, 10-15 women in our weekly support group, the need is growing and our program must grow to keep up with it.

The floodgates are open now and a movement is on the rise. We invite our community partners to be part of it and help us support the efforts of so many women in our community who are struggling to free themselves from abuse. It is every woman's fundamental right to be free and safe in her own home--and every child's right. Please join us in supporting the struggle of every survivor in our community to unlock the gilded cage.