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## Battered Woman Syndrome

**NOTE:** While men are also victims of domestic violence, the concept of battered woman syndrome typically refers only to women. For this reason, the following description will follow this format but recognizes that the same or a similar mindset could hold true for battered men as well.

A controversial concept, **battered woman syndrome** is a model that was developed by Dr. Lenore E. Walker to describe the mindset and emotional state of a battered woman. A battered woman is a woman who has experienced at least two complete battering cycles as described in dating and domestic violence.

Battered women stay in these dangerous relationships for a variety of reasons including:

- still being positively reinforced by the "honeymoon" phase of the battering cycle
- economic dependence upon the batterer
- belief that they can keep the peace
- fear of danger if she were to leave
- threats made by the batterer to hurt her or her children if she left
- loss of self-esteem
- depression or loss of psychological energy necessary to leave

According to Walker's *The Battered Woman Syndrome* (p. 95-97, 1984), there are four general characteristics of the syndrome:

1. The woman believes that the violence was or is her fault.
2. The woman has an inability to place responsibility for the violence elsewhere.
3. The woman fears for her life and/or her children's lives.
4. The woman has an irrational belief that the abuser is omnipresent and omniscient.

More recently, Battered Woman Syndrome has also been associated with post-traumatic stress disorder in that domestic violence involves exposure to severe trauma and so the reactions of a battered woman may be due to flashbacks or other intrusive experiences from previous traumatic events so that the woman believes that she is in danger, even if she is not.

This syndrome has been used as an explanation for reactions to abusive situations in court cases but has also been used as an educational tool in order to raise the awareness of the impact that domestic violence can have on women.

