

There are many reasons why women stay in a relationship where they are being abused. The 9 Fs are:

“Why doesn’t she just... leave?”

FEAR

Fear is often the most significant factor why women stay in a relationship where they are being abused. Women may fear for their safety, the safety of their children, or the safety of other family members. Women may worry about what the person who abuses them will do if they try to leave or seek help; they fear retaliation. In addition to the physical fear, women often also experience emotional fear due to the tactics used against them such as gaslighting, manipulation, and the use of isolation as a way to control them, often leaving them feeling powerless and alone. This can make it extremely difficult for women to leave as they may feel like they have nowhere else to turn. Leaving can also be a very dangerous and complicated process for women, and that increases their existing level of fear.

FRIENDS

Friendship can be a factor in why women stay in a relationship where they are being abused. The person using violence against them often uses isolation as a tactic to control their partner, cutting them off from their friends and support networks. Women may feel like they have lost touch with their friends or that their friends may not understand their situation. They may worry about the judgement of their friends or feel ashamed about the abuse they are experiencing. Sometimes the person using violence can control the woman’s friendships by using manipulation to gain the trust of the woman’s friends, or to turn her friends against her. It is essential that the friends understand the dynamics of domestic and family violence so they can approach the woman with empathy and understanding, and to support them in the decisions they make about their safety and well-being.

FATIGUE

Fatigue can play a role in why women stay in a relationship where they are being abused. Women who are experiencing domestic and family violence are often emotionally and physically exhausted from the ongoing abuse, which can make it extremely difficult for them to take action or make decisions about leaving the relationship. It can feel like a matter of survival every day for women. The person using abuse may use the woman’s exhaustion as a tactic to maintain control over her, using physical violence, emotional abuse, or other tactics to wear her down and make it even more difficult for her to resist. Fatigue is a common response to ongoing abuse, and it is not a sign of weakness or failure.

FINANCES

Finances can be a significant factor in why women stay in a relationship where they are being abused. The person using abuse uses financial control as a means of maintaining power and control over the woman. They may limit the woman’s access to money or force the woman to hand over their earnings. This can leave the woman feeling financially dependent and unable to leave the relationship. Women who have children may also be concerned about their ability to financially support themselves and their children if they were to leave. They may worry about being able to provide their basic needs such as food, shelter, and clothing. Additionally, leaving can be costly with many women needing to find new housing, pay for legal fees, or medical attention for any injuries. Women may have to start from scratch in terms of building their financial stability which can be a daunting task or prospect.

FAITH

For some women, their faith and religious beliefs can be a factor why they stay in a relationship where they are being abused. Religious beliefs may teach women to value the sanctity of marriage and they may feel obligated to remain in the relationship to uphold religious values or beliefs. Sometimes the person using violence uses religion as a means of control, using scripture or religious teachings to justify their abusive behaviour or to convince their partner that leaving the relationship would be a sin. Although it is imperative to recognise that religious beliefs and values should never be used to condone abuse, assistance to women needs to be provided while respecting their religious beliefs and values.

FANTASY

It is not uncommon for women to stay in a relationship where they are being abused due to a fantasy or unrealistic belief that the person using violence will change, and the relationship will improve and become loving and healthy. Some women hold onto such fantasies despite the ongoing abuse which can make it even more challenging for them to leave. Such fantasies are often a result of the psychological and emotional manipulation and control tactics used by the person using abuse against them. The person may use love-bombing, charm, or other manipulative tactics to create a sense of false hope in the women and to maintain control over her. The fantasies are not based in reality, and the responsibility for their creation lies with the person using abuse.

FAMILY

Family can play a huge role in why women stay in a relationship where they are being abused. Women may worry about the impact that leaving the relationship could have on their children or their extended family. They may fear being ostracised by their family or community, or worry that their children will be negatively impacted by the separation. Women may also feel a sense of obligation or duty to stay in the relationship for the sake of their children or to maintain the appearance of a stable family.

FEELINGS

Feelings can play a role in why women stay in a relationship where they are being abused. Women may have feelings of love, attachment, and loyalty towards the person despite them using abuse against them. Women may feel guilty or responsible for the abuse or blame themselves for their partner’s behaviour. Women may feel like they can change their partner or that the abuse is only temporary. They often hope that their partner will change or believe that they can work through the problems in the relationship. Women often need support to process their feelings and emotions to help them make informed decisions about their safety and well-being.

FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness can play a factor in why women stay in a relationship where they are being abused. Women may feel like they need to forgive their partner in order to move forward in the relationship or to maintain a sense of peace. The person using abuse may also use forgiveness as a manipulation tactic, apologising for their behaviour and promising to change, only to continue to abuse later. Forgiveness is a personal decision, and it should not be used as a tool to excuse or justify ongoing abuse.