The Courtroom as a Venue
for Further Domestic Abuse: The Clinical Perspective

by Dr. Susan Weitzman
The Weitzman Center
Chicago and Lincolnshire, Illinois

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Traits and Tactics in Upscale Abuse Cases from the Clinical Perspective


Upscale abuse, a term originally coined from my research and featured in “Not to People like Us: Hidden Abuse in Upscale Marriages” (Basic Books), is characterized as emotional or physical abuse or violence, reported or non-reported, among families of upper educated and upper income status, or people of means. Basically, domestic abuse among people with higher education and/or from upper income families who live ‘enviable lifestyles,’ where one would not characteristically expect to see abuse.

Upscale abuse includes: emotional abuse, public humiliation, coercive control, fiduciary abuse, gaslighting and emotional blackmail and manipulation, physical abuse, custody and litigation battles, punitive in intention and nature, insidious threat to lifestyle and well being and even murder and death. One of the challenges of identifying and serving this population is that these individuals often fall below the radar and do not readily utilize these services. My research, further confirmed by years of clinical examples and narratives shared with me at conferences, through emails, at my healing weekend retreats, or in my roles as a litigation consultant and expert witness, uncovered unique patterns in upscale abuse. The following twelve factors are hallmarks of how upscale abuse can be differentiated from abuse among other individuals:

(1) The upscale abused woman usually did not experience abuse in her childhood, witness it in her parents’ marriage or among contemporaries in her neighborhood/community, so when it happens to her, she doesn’t recognize it as abuse within her marriage. She is confused and tries to find ways to explain or label the behaviors of her abusive husband. She tells herself things like: “He’s had a bad day;” “I guess I married an angry person;” “Honeymoons get people upset,” “Maybe I need to be a better wife,” etc. I refer to this as “justification by
“explanation,” which is a form of denial that too often keeps people in abusive relationships.

(2) Energetic and creative, usually quite effective and successful in her past and current history, she feels she can fix the problem herself. She typically redoubles her efforts to make things “right” and control the growing volatility. When efforts fail, she self-blames and imposes isolation due to fear, embarrassment and believing abuse shouldn’t happen to “someone like her.” Her not being able to “fix it” (and it commonly thought that domestic abuse only continues to grow worse and not just abate), leads to additional shame.

(3) She buys into the cultural myth that domestic abuse does not happen to “people like us.” (‘…I am a doctor/dentist/psychologist/PhD physicist/lawyer/nurse, etc., [fill in the blank]…and I should know better!’).

(4) She hides to preserve her identity, her children’s lifestyle, her husband’s career and the family’s financial and social standing.

(5) The upscale abused woman does not typically come forth in public settings and tends to hide beneath what I call the “veil of silence,” as they are embarrassed and ashamed. She feels that if she did “come out” about what was occurring in their marriages, she would be disbelieved, so she is reluctant to seek help. She doesn’t go to a shelter, feeling she won’t fit in. She also aptly feels that she will not fit into some settings. For instance, I worked with one woman who wore her fur court to domestic violence court in the winter. Another woman, whose wrist was broken, thought peers in a shelter could not relate to the fact that in her narrative, the abuse took place as they were leaving their private jet. While the abuse is the same and just as injurious, the setting does not engender sympathy or help her to fit in.

(6) Too often, this fear turns into reality and their revelations as to what is going on in their marriages is often met with not only disbelief by friends and family, but sometimes disdain or dismissive remarks. “You have such a great life, what are you complaining about?;” “You have so much to be grateful for...,” are actual
statements emblematic of the tone of the responses from peers, family, even the professionals who work with them!

(7) Victim’s concerns are mollified by others. Excuses are often made for the abuser, the abuse is written off as a tough period or communication trouble in the marriage, and their lifestyle is pointed to as reasons to continue dealing with the abuse (e.g., “Look how great your life is…,” “Your husband is such a good provider to you and the kids, you must support him through a tough time,” “Everyone has to deal with their partner’s moods,” etc.) Not surprisingly, sometimes the people defending the abuser have financial or tangible support from the abuser and they do not wish to disturb that arrangement. Again, “justification by explanation.” Helping professionals may attribute her problems to “marital communication issues,” leads to her feeling further self-doubt and self imposing more isolation. I would also note the irony, unique to upscale abuse, is that in other cases, the abuser takes actions to make the partner’s social circle very small, keeping her from friends and family. In the case of upscale abuse, the victim does this to herself, out of shame, embarrassment, and fear of being disbelieved.

(8) Perceived as having access to vast resources, she engenders little empathy from others. Left alone to contend with the marriage, she becomes depressed, fatigued and anxious. She then further self-isolates.

(9) Even professionals may attribute her problems to “marital communication issues,” leading to further self-doubt and isolation. Sadly, as I alluded to in factors # 5 and #6, the upscale abused person is too often inadvertently re-victimized by people and professionals in place to help them (like lawyers, clinicians, clergy, physicians, etc.) who write off the abuse to “marital communication issues” and hence, disbelieve the extent of the problem, urging them to go back and work on the marriage or relationship, which sometimes leads to mortal and grave consequences. One case I recall was where an abusive husband threw a glass of water at his wife in the psychotherapist’s office, and
the psychotherapist’s ONLY response was to offer the wife some paper towels to dry off!

(10) Hidden behind the veil of silence, the abused person does not have any one to bounce her perceptions off for validation or feedback, her circle becomes very small, and the person who helps her define what is happening is too often the abuser. And the abuser is quick to blame her, stating that the abuse is due to that person’s action, mis-actions, thoughtlessness, etc. This is called “blaming the victim.”

(11) The upscale abusive husband rarely shows remorse, and is uncommonly unapologetic. He believes he has been wronged, justifying his unreasonable expectations, narcissistic entitlement and vitriolic attacks.

(12) The upscale abuser has power, means, resources and connections to make good on any threats to the person who wants to air the truth of the abuse in the marriage. He often does get away with the abuse, has a lack of accountability due to his stature, status, blind spots, and assumptions about his. Further, the emotional abuse and fiduciary abuse are subtle enough to cause damage but get no punishment. In some cases, often well publicized, the abuser can even get away with murder.
Traits of the Upscale Abuser ©Weitzman, 2000

The upscale abuser often exhibits the following traits:

- Arrogant.
- Believes he is “special” and can only be understood by or should only associate with other special or high-status people (or institutions).
- Educated.
- Experiences narcissistic rage over real or perceived slights and injuries.
- Feeling of impunity regarding his behavior and mood swings.
- Grandiose sense of self-importance; sense of entitlement, (unreasonable expectations of especially favorable treatment or automatic compliance with his expectations).
- Has fantasies about his achievements: unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, ideal love.
- Important figure, well admired in community or work world.
- Interested only in his own sexual gratification; disregards his wife’s needs. For some men, this leads to multiple extramarital affairs to which they feel entitled.
- Is often envious of others or believes that others are envious of him or her. Needs to be “top dog.”
- Lacks empathy for others; is unwilling to recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others. Sees significant others as extensions of self, there to meet his needs—expects that person to respond perfectly. Uses people as chess pieces.
- Requires excessive admiration and recognition.
- Self-absorbed.
- Successful.
- Terrified of not being respected by others.
- Well-liked and often charming and charismatic.

Taken from: "NOT TO PEOPLE LIKE US":
Hidden Abuse in Upscale Marriages
By Susan Weitzman, Ph.D.
Published by Basic Books, a member of the Perseus Books Group. Distributed by HarperCollins Publishers
Publication Date: October 1, 2000 © ISBN: 0-465-09073-7/$26.00/289 pages
Characteristic Actions of the Upscale Abuser © Weitzman, 2000

Please note that while many of the traits above are common in all types of domestic abuse, and while the following actions may overlap with behaviors seen in domestic abuse in all economic spheres, what varies and makes it unique to upscale abuse are the methods and execution of such actions. This population has ways and means to make good on secondary or sophisticated tactics, extreme threats, consequences, esp. in the legal realm.

- Blames wife for any household mishap, whatever the cause.
- Creates—constant, conflicting and contradictory shifts in expectations, what I have termed “shifting sands.”
- Absence of apologies, even after brutal attacks.
- Is interpersonally exploitative (takes advantage of others to achieve own ends).
- Makes excessive demands on how wife should look/behave; demands not necessarily clear, discrete or consistent. May demand unfair/unreasonable pre-nup agreements.
- Makes demeaning and hyper-critical attacks on wife’s femininity, sexuality, looks, maternal behaviors. Character assassination.
- Makes unrealistic demands and expectations of others.
- Needs to be in control of others in every situation.
- Turns the tables and blames wife for his behaviors.
- Uses his money and power to win legal battles, pursue frivolous and meritless lawsuits, wage vicious custody struggles. Uses status as leverage for further threats.
- Uses the courtroom as another venue for abuse via financially and emotionally draining litigation and custody battles.
- Threatens well being of children and continued lifestyle.
- Uses influence to impact victim’s significant others and social circle/community.

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Courtship/Marriage Narratives Often Reported by Upscale Abused Women © Weitzman, 2000

The upscale abuser woman frequently reports the following themes:

- Cinderella type beliefs about love and marriage.
- Concerns about money or came from lower income family, craves financial security.
- Feels a power imbalance, but feels more sure of self when with him, “raised a rung.”
- Felt intimidated or inferior to the man.
- Felt magic, was “transported;” she is swept off her feet by attention, use of lavish actions by abuser and relentless pursuit.
- Impressed by the man’s charisma, personality style.
- Impressed with man’s socioeconomic standing and money.
- Impressed with man’s prestige and power, status and style.
- Was pursued by the man.
- He rushed commitment.
- She idealized/idealizes him.
- Sometimes man was first sexual encounter.
- Increased susceptibility due to either a major life event or change prior to meeting husband or loneliness prior to meeting him.
- Ignored or justified early warning signs in man indicative of future abuse.

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Early Warning Signs that the Upscale Abused Woman Overlooks or Ignores

Patterns I found in my research and subsequent clinical illustrations can be found early on. Please note that not all of these examples automatically predict that the man will be abusive partner, but they have been commonly reported by upscale abused women.

The early warning signs most common are as follows:

- The man dominates the woman verbally, criticizing and belittling her, throwing her off balance or causing her to doubt her own worth and abilities.
- He makes all plans, neither inquiring as to the woman’s desires nor gathering input from her.
- He exploits the woman’s debilitated or emotional fragility.
- He alone sets the sexual pace, initiating all contacts and rejecting any of the woman’s sexual approaches.
- He makes most of the decisions about the future and announces them to the woman instead of including her in planning and decision-making. He refuses to compromise on major decisions.
- He is moody, making it difficult for the woman to predict what the next encounter with him will be like.
- He is chronically late without apology or remorse.
- He determines when the couple can discuss issues, if at all; he repeatedly justifies this control by claiming that he “hates conflict.”
- He is hostile toward others as well as his future bride: unjustified rage, arrogance, controlling behavior, pouting and withdrawal of affection, and sudden coldness and rejection.
- His father was abusive to his own wife.
- He demands control over woman’s contacts with friends, family, finances.
- He publicly humiliates the woman. This sometimes began as “put-down” humor, but rather than apologizing, he urges her to “Get a thicker skin!” or “Lighten up!” when she protests.
• He attempts to control partner’s with others.
• He slaps, pushes, or hits the woman.
• He exhibits rage, arrogance, pouting, and withdrawal if not given his way.
• He shows sudden coldness or rejecting behavior.
• He has an uncontrolled temper or unprecipitated anger at others.
• He is highly critical of the woman.
• He refuses to compromise or negotiate on major decisions.
• He makes deprecating comments meant to make the woman feel unsure of herself or to undermine her sense of self.
• He is verbally domineering.
• He flaunts his relationships other women.

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Coping Strategies Used by the Upscale Abused Woman © Weitzman, 2000

- Belief in the myth that “this doesn’t happen to people like us.”
- Denial.
- Drug or alcohol use.
- Embarrassment and shame as to being seen as a failure keeps the woman further isolated “I made my bed, so…”
- Fear of loss of socioeconomic status and benefits.
- Financial justification (for woman and for the children’s sake).
- Idealization of the situation, its potential, the relationship.
- Isolation and secret keeping.
- Keeping quiet/”playing possum.”
- “Justification by explanation.”
- Narrative construction allowing for abuse.
- Nothing was ever discussed.
- Denial : “Not to people like us.”
- Self blame.
- “Secret strategizing.”
- Hyper-vigilance, walking on egg shells.
- Vigilant watching/scanning to predict.
- Eternal hope. Wanting to believe/hope against hope.

Why is Upscale Abuse Under-Identified and Under-treated in the Clinical Realm?

- Blind spots impact clinician’s clarity, including inherent belief that it does not happen within this population.
- Uninformed treatment strategies or interventions…or lack thereof. Misinformed treatment decisions, e.g., use of conjoint therapy for “marital communication for a high conflict couple that experiences abuse.
- Repeated complaints about husband’s tactics and especially within the realm of litigation are often seen as not real or over-exaggerated.
- Victim’s presentation, denial and “veil of silence” fog issues, and clinician misses it.
- Victim’s style easily viewed as histrionic or other personality disorders.
- Misdiagnosis of role of partner as well as collateral sources.
- Disbelief in client’s or patient’s narrative. Some of the real life stories beg for confirmation they may be so over the top and extreme, but true.
- Delivery systems not in place for this population.
- Perceived as unworthy of limited free services.
- Elf select out of services available for apt estimation that they will not fit in at shelters, support groups, etc.
- Training and education not readily available.
- The problem or upscale abuse and sophisticated tactics is generally not known, discussed, acknowledged.
- Clinicians may miss underlying issues.
- Lack of awareness as to need to work collaboratively with attorneys.
- Lack of clarity on extent, form and potential impact of documentation.
- Inadvertent over-identification with upscale abuse victim.
- Counter-transference issues including envy and disdain.
Upscale Abuse in the Legal Realm

I believe that much of what I have described thus far finds its way into the courtroom battles and might be categorized as a form of domestic abuse. It is well known that the most extreme violence often takes place in the actual separation stage of the relationship, when the individual is actually leaving their abusive partner. This has been pointed to, in the literature as well as in stated statistics, as the most dangerous time for the person leaving.

But perhaps separation is not only met with physical violence. What I have been seeing over these last many years is that perhaps what happens in the legal realm is another version of separation “violence.” It takes place during divorce/custody battles after the relationship ends. People subjected to abuses taking place within the legal system are losing financial stability as they respond to frivolous lawsuits created to undermine, intimidate, control, terrorize and further financially destroy and wound. Such tactics manifest as forms of fiduciary abuse, emotional turmoil and degradations, and heart-wrenching pain as parents are separated from their children.

Intents and Motives of the Upscale Abuser

The upscale abuser uses complicated and sophisticated legal tactics to further his intent or hurt and abuse his partner.

Intents and Motives include:

- To hurt, injure, debilitate, take power and control.
- Has same power base/angry, abusive feel as actual battering.
- Instead of beating, pushing, and/or insulting, it takes the form of court time, aimed at going on and on, creating huge demand for legal services. Typically there is a vast inequality in the potential to recoup from the cost of such litigation.
- Long drawn out custody battles (even if man does not want the children)
• Fiduciary Abuse. In many cases, the upscale abuse has been heard to say, “I am gonna drain her dry,” “I’m willing to spend $2 to make you lose $1,” or “My friend is a lawyer, it costs be no fees to continue dragging her into court;” or take actions which reflect the thinking that “My family’s financial war chest will support my meritless lawsuits and make her life a living hell as well as making her go bankrupt!”

• Fiduciary Abuse can also take the form of squandering or concealing or absconding with marital assets or even assets of the victim that were sole prior to the marriage.

• Defaming of woman’s abilities and status in court litigation.

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Clinical Impact and Reverberations of Sophisticated Abuse Tactics on Victim

- Emotional stress and duress of preparing and responding to legal battles.
- Undermined parenting.
- Built up rage and frustration.
- Victim becomes moody, inconsistent, anxious, depressed, fatigued. The children are drawn in, too, in subtle and not so subtle ways.
- Unable to beat the man’s “legal dream teams, the woman has been “proven” or deemed to not deserve custody and actually has lost it.
- According to the American Psychological Association, abusive parents are more likely to see sole custody than non-violent ones, and according to the American Judges Foundation, they are successful about 70% of the time.
- Untrackable and generally un-actionable threats and actions by the abuser contribute to the traumatic and disempowering experience of the victim.
- Children turn away from the non abusive parent and pander to the abusive parent who has influenced their views are holds severe financial and lifestyle deprivations over their heads.
- The woman becomes a living example what I have termed “husband fulfilling prophecy.” Due to the incredible powerlessness she feels to fight his charges, and the limitations that are often mandated while working within the legal system, her frustration, rage, and sadness grows to the point that she often can be and present as difficult, angry, moody, inconsistent, naïve, anxious, depressed, hysteric. Such, she does not engender great sympathy in the courtroom or clinical scenario, presenting as the type of unstable personality that would not nurture well, and not warrant the kinds of remedies or custody she truly would deserve. She may shoot herself in the foot by not being able to control her presentation. I have consulted on many cases where the attorneys have utilized ne to help “shape” the woman into being a better witness to her own defense and testimony on the stand.
NOT TO PEOPLE LIKE US: HIDDEN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN UPSCALE FAMILIES

SUSAN WEITZMAN, PhD

The following is an excerpt of a journal article to be published in 2009 as well as content from Not to People like Us: Hidden Abuse in Upscale Families (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

Sally, a pretty, educated, forty-eight-year-old homemaker, had told no one about the violence that existed within her seemingly happy marriage. When I first met her, she was stylishly dressed in a designer suit, tiny diamond earrings glinting beneath her flowing blonde hair. A beautiful bracelet and a remarkable string of pearls completed the picture of a woman of substantial means. But all was not well in Sally’s world. Married to Ray, a highly successful businessman, she gave elegant dinner parties only to be brutally beaten afterwards for offering some of her husband’s favorite dessert for admiring guests to take home. A gracious hostess known for her parties, she wryly commented on her husband’s post-party attack: “This is not what Martha Stewart would have had in mind!”

I had met Sally during her divorce and the façade of civility and upper-class life behind which she had been hiding had already begun to crumble. Ray had been beating and emotionally abusing Sally for years, with early warning signs present as early as their honeymoon.

Although all the names and identities in this article have been disguised and altered to protect the anonymity of the women who have shared their stories, the stories themselves and any quotations from them are NOT fictitious and remain true to the content and process of the narratives.
Historically, social work (as evidenced within social work literature) draws us to those who are disadvantaged in society, e.g., the poor, the underprivileged, the downtrodden and the helpless. Domestic violence is a grave and epidemic issue, impacting, according to statistics, a large proportion of the population. While the literature suggests that this phenomenon is spread across all economic classes, little research has been done on domestic violence amongst women of upper socioeconomic status (SES), a term with a composite definition made up of self-perceived status, income and education levels. “Not to People like Us: Hidden Abuse in Upscale Marriages” (Weitzman, S., Basic Books, 2000) was deemed the first non-fiction book dedicated to this topic.

So why an article in The Social Work Networker focusing on upper income and upper educated women who have enviable lifestyles, who appear to have a lot going for them, and who possess the potential for ‘having it all?’

1 The population studied includes people who have material advantages within society but yet are still depleted due to serious hidden complications in their lives, despite financial, educational and social resources. Social work looks at person-in-environment. These individuals persist in and often have adapted to their abusive environment in misguided ways, but have attempted to adapt nonetheless. A trait often associated with the abused wife is the tremendous ability to try creatively to control a volatile situation. She may feel trapped by the “positive benefits” of her situation due to all the other commitments she has made in her current life and life style, commitments that contribute to her staying in the relationship.

2 If this population is at all represented in a clinical social worker’s caseload, then it is possible that many clinical social workers and other helping professionals may be treating abused women and not be aware of it. Many such clients do not readily report or reveal abuse as part of their presenting problem. Although being in an abusive relationship may not be the stated reason a person seeks treatment with a clinical social worker, it may be a major contributing/underlying factor to the client’s life. If early statistics from the ’70s and ’80s remain predictive, i.e., at least 50% of women will experience marital abuse, then certainly the problem will be part of the clinical social worker’s caseload.

**RESEARCH STUDY**

My formal research study examined the experience of domestic abuse among upper educated and upper socioeconomic status (SES) women which I termed “upscale abuse” or “upscale violence.” (Weitzman, 2000). This group represents a heretofore unstudied sub-population of abused women in need of service. Within the research analysis, early warning signs, the unwitting re-traumatization by helping professionals and significant others, and societal assumptions about this sub-group affected reticence for them to come forth and reluctance to seek help for domestic abuse. Some of the study’s unique findings are the emergence of a “path” that the upper educated/upper SES woman proceeds along as she enters and stays in the abusive marriage and the redefinition of “need” as applied to women of educational and/or financial means.

Their presenting problems usually do not involve abuse, but rather, depression, fatigue, overall unhappiness, life dissatisfaction, or anxiety. As understood through the reports of the victims, unlike the typical cycle... at least 50% of women will experience marital abuse... as well as the coping strategies, utilized by the upper SES abused wife; and the decision-making points and strategies for extrication from the abusive relationship.

Findings that emerged were not consistent with the existing literature. The women did not typically experience learned helplessness, cognitive dissonance, or the cycle of violence. According to the women’s reports, rarely did the upscale abuser show remorse or offer a honeymoon phase after an abusive episode and prior to the next occurrence.

Findings of this qualitative research study, confirmed in subsequent years of clinical practice and from numerous response letters from across the U.S. and beyond, confirm that domestic abuse is insidiously present among women who are well educated and from upper income families. Unique to this study in addition to its findings is the patterned description of the lived experience of what I termed upscale violence.

A brief summary of the study’s major findings:

- A distinct path seems to be common, as the woman proceeds from courtship to marriage, to abused wife, to ultimately leaving the relationship. The woman is primarily imprisoned by the silence she perceives her culture expects her to maintain.
- Most of the women never experienced abuse in their family of origin or among their peers, so when it took place in their own marriages, they did not really recognize it, or view it as the abuse that it was. They redouble efforts to make things “right,” and when such efforts fail, self-blame kicks marked by beliefs that well educated and upper SES people do not experience abuse in their relationships.
- The woman self-isolates due to fear, embarrassment, and believing the myth that abuse “doesn’t happen to people like us.” Even though her peers may be experiencing similar emotional and physical abuse at home, the veil of silence isolates them from each other, and continues the myth that it is not occurring.

**STUDY’S MAJOR FINDINGS**

The study looked at the lived experience of upscale violence and uncovered some distinctive points: idiosyncratic aspects of abuse among this population; the discovery of the courtship pattern of
of violence, the abusive upscale man rarely shows remorse or provides a honeymoon phase and is uncommonly unapologetic after his abusive behavior and prior to the next occurrence. Primarily, this is because he believes he has been wronged, he is the victim, and his narcissistic injuries cause, and in his mind, justify the rage he then releases upon his wife when his expectations are not met, expectations reflective of excessive feelings of entitlement. The man’s own sense of narcissism, reinforced by his typically powerful position the community or in his work life, leads him to be unusually demanding of his partner, creating hurdles for her to jump which are unreasonable.

- The woman self imposes silence. She may have a need to keep her lifestyle for the children’s sake as well as for her own identity, and may not wish to jeopardize the man’s work and thus their financial security, as well as the family’s social standing.

- She is rarely believed. Unlike her lower SES counterpart, the abused upscale woman is rarely believed when she does “come out” about the violence in her home. Seen as having great resources, she engenders little empathy from others; she is perceived as having the access to most of what is desirable in life. Also, the man’s public persona usually belies the abusive side of him, making the women’s experience seem hard to believe, especially “among people like us,” adding to the blind spot in our society about abuse amongst this population.

- Unwitting re-traumatizing by helping professionals and significant others occurs. When the abused upscale woman finally does seek help, disbelief she often encounters leads to further isolation, self doubt and, most dangerously, a type of re-victimization by helping professionals supposedly there to help, e.g., physicians, attorneys, mental health professionals and the court system.

- The upscale abusive male has access to resources that his lower SES counterpart does not, so he actually can make good on his threats and even often be “above the law” as he creates legal dream teams to protect himself. Litigation and the courts are also used as a secondary venue to abuse the wife, in frivolous lawsuits draining her financially as well as arduous custody battles that often wrongly result in the woman losing custody, due to the amazing legal counsel the man can provide for himself.

- Extrication can occur once the woman “comes out” as to what is occurring in her home life, and be believed by others around her. Acknowledging her own initial instinctive impressions (i.e., early warning signs) and breaking her secrecy and isolation about the abuse, along with affirmation and support of “other voices” (i.e. social validation) regarding domestic abuse keenly impacted the upper SES woman’s ability to leave the situation.

**WHAT IS NEEDED**

Acknowledgement of the phenomenon of **upscale violence** (and its distinct aspects) by clinical social workers and other clinicians would allow for those paradoxically disenfranchised women to find viable resources from which to seek help for their problems. This, along with increased education about the phenomenon might: foster seeking help earlier in the abusive marriage; augment prevention, intervention, and treatment strategies; and potentially cause professionals to investigate more thoroughly and rigorously the possibility of abuse among this population.

**SOCIETAL IMPLICATIONS**

The societal implications of the findings are compelling:

- We, as a culture, must lift our own veils, remove our blind spots, and desist in our inadvertent call to silence for upscale abused women.

- The concept of need must be flexible. The social work profession, appropriately, seeks out and serves the oppressed and needy, and the upscale abused client can be included in such a description, despite his/her apparent assets. This requires a more refined and informed understanding that people with education and material resources have needs not necessarily ameliorated by their advantages and assets.

- Arousal of public consciousness about the problem of upscale abuse is necessary. With increased awareness that abuse actually does happen to “people like us,” we, as a society, can with this issue in mind develop a more informed and nuanced understanding of batterers, which clients we evaluated, and create better service options for this segment of abused women. The issue must receive more overt public attention so that outreach efforts can be made to a client system reticent to come forth. (See the thoughtful novel on this topic, Whispers by Belva Plain, 1994).

- A social movement is needed to find a way to mobilize all women around the issue of battering which could then potentially impact law and social policy.

**CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS**

The clinical/practice implications of the findings are significant:

- The opportunity exists to identify and serve a heretofore under-identified and hence, under-served population.

- Keen diagnostic questioning in non-invasive ways are key skills for clinical social workers to deploy. There is high probability, based on earlier predictive statistics as to domestic abuse occurrence, that we, as social work professionals, are seeing numerous clients that fall into this client system identified, even if the presenting problem is not so stated.

- Clinical sensitivity can avert potential tragic, even deadly, results.

- The awareness that re-traumatization by helping professionals and significant others does occur, if merely due to the ignorance that such abuse does take place.

- The understanding of how this study’s findings can help similar people, as breaking the veil of silence is what is needed in this population in order for them to break away from the abuse hidden in their upscale marriages. Better screening methods for gleaning abuse are needed.

- Acknowledgement of the phenomenon of **upscale violence** (and its distinct aspects) by clinical social workers and other helping professionals will allow the disenfranchised, abused, upper SES woman to find viable resources from whom to seek help for her problem and could be transformational in...
Hidden Domestic Violence in Upscale Families

Continued from cover.

nature. Consistent with the social work tenet of person-in-environment, affirmation and support from “other voices” (i.e., social validation) regarding domestic abuse keenly impacts the upper SES woman who has endured it in silence.

- Treatment delivery systems, client system advocacy and better outreach efforts must be created that address this lack of service options. The upscale, battered woman rarely will go to a shelter, as she feels she will not quite fit in, which many clients have reported. And she is right, to some degree. Several clients have told me that they felt very much out of place in the domestic violence court waiting area; some have reported being snubbed or put on the back burner when requesting services from local domestic violence phone helplines. (Weitzman, 2000).

CONCLUSIONS

We, as clinicians, have our own blind spots. A clinician in fact may be treating an abused woman and not even know it. She may not admit to it or feel that the concept of domestic abuse even pertains to her or her situation. The upper educated or woman of upper income may elicit and, therefore, receive little empathy or sympathy as many assume she has or can get whatever she needs. Subtle envy may also contribute to the deaf ear or blind eye. Perceptive clinical awareness of those trapped, even in somewhat enviable environs, is the called for remedy.

Because upscale abuse women often feel unable to open up in their community, because they are often overlooked within their own clinician’s office, being told that the difficulties in their marriages are ‘communication issues,’ and because their husbands often control the purse strings making their efforts for help or escape very easily monitored, these women are in a state of need.

Unfortunately, when overlooked and underserved, unfortunately, in many cases the outcomes are tragic and deadly. The outcomes can range from physical wounds to deaths, the breaking up of a family through misguided custody decisions, and misdeeds where justice is not served in the courts due to the man’s resources for legal counsel and entitled protection. Awareness that abuse exists amongst the upper SES portion of our population may help to change our own insights with this client system.

Sally was able to leave her abusive husband, and, over time, heal and recover her life, rebuilding her self esteem and support network, and reshaping her views on relationships and what was acceptable. Sadly, not all victims of upscale abuse are able to do that.

It is essential that we, as a society as well as helping professionals, understand more about what I refer to as upscale abuse. Outreach to this population, increased education and awareness for professionals, and investigation of what is going on as re-victimization, especially in the court system, must take place. The more that is revealed, the more enlightened we all can become, saving countless lives of abused women, as well as the fates and destinies of the children involved. Unless we are alert to this being a recurrent experience with this population, a host of physicians, lawyers and therapists alike, may beg off pursuing it. If one does not want to see it, if there is an inadvertent blind spot, one will not look for it, and the population will sadly remain hidden and silent.

Susan Weitzman, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., is a psychotherapist, educator, researcher, national lecturer and litigation consultant. Her years of research resulted in her groundbreaking work, Not to People Like Us: Hidden Abuse in Upscale Marriages, New York: Basic Books, 2000, (www.nottopeoplelikeus.com), featured on Oprah, 20/20, NPR and in The Chicago Tribune and NY Post. Currently in private practice, she was on staff at the University of Chicago Dept. of Psychiatry for 11 years.

She is the Co-Founder and President of The Weitzman Center (incorporated in 2001), a not-for-profit organization whose mission is to provide support, information, and referral to women and families struggling against the effects of upscale abuse (www.theweitzmancenter.org).

Dr. Weitzman lectures and conducts workshops nationally and runs intensive weekend retreats for women recovering from abusive relationships. She is the recipient of numerous awards for her work including NASW IL Social Worker of the Year in Illinois in 2002.

When the abused upscale woman finally does seek help, disbelief she often encounters leads to further isolation, self doubt and, most dangerously, a type of re-victimization...

REFERENCES


Bostrum, Shirley Pierce (2002). Funny—He Doesn’t Look like a Murderer but Margie is Dead. Marlborough, CT: Calie Books.


CALL FOR PRESENTATIONS

The NASW Illinois is now accepting applications for its Statewide Conference “A Meeting of the Profession” to be held in September 9 - 11, 2009. Submissions are being accepted for the following tracks:

Track I – School Social Work
Track II – Mental Health
Track III – Private Practice
Track IV – Diversity/Cultural
Track V – Leadership and Management
Track VI – Health
Track VII – Aging
Track VIII- Family/Child Welfare
Track IX – Policy and Legislation

GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSION:

Complete the presenter application form online at www.naswil.org. Which will include:

- A brief biographical paragraph for each presenter describing their credentials, experience relevant to the proposed topic and current employment.
- Title (10 word maximum)
- Description of how the presentation fits within the chosen track
- Presentation format
- Specific learning objectives (no more than 5)
- Practice level
- 250 word brief description of presentation
- Contact information - If the presentation has more than one presenter, identify the lead presenter. All correspondence for your presentation (if selected) will be sent to the lead presenter.

CRITERIA FOR SELECTION:

Submissions will be judged on clarity of content, relevance to the social work knowledge base, presentation of new or unique and visionary approaches to practice methods or models and policy and research, use of unbiased language with respect to ethnicity and gender and utilization of outcome measures. Workshop presentations are 90 minutes.

A panel of experts in each practice area will evaluate the submissions. The submissions will not include personal information at the time of evaluation. The submissions will be evaluated as they are submitted. Early submission DOES improve your chances of being accepted as there is more time for clarification or to send back the submission for modification.

FEE/EQUIPMENT DETAILS:

- Presenters receive a discounted fee for the entire conference ($85.00) All presenters must pay the required fee. [A savings of over $215.00]
- Presenters will receive CEU’s for presentations they create specifically for this event.
- Overhead and a screen are FREE but must be requested in advance.
- Presenters are allowed to bring their OWN equipment for their presentation.
- Presenters who need to rent equipment MUST rent it from the hotel directly and purchase the rental equipment on their own.

DEADLINE:

Submissions must be entered online no later than February 13, 2009.

Notification of acceptance will be made before April 10, 2009.
Domestic violence has ticked up since September 2008—and not only among the financially strained. Eliza Shapiro reports on the hurdles rich abused women face, from disbelief by peers to ‘legal dream teams.’

A common image of domestic violence: a woman on the brink of homelessness, taking refuge from her abusive spouse in a shelter because she has nowhere else to go.
But recent domestic violence cases in the news, from South African Olympian Oscar Pistorius allegedly murdering his girlfriend to CBS New York anchor Rob Morrison accused of choking his wife, are revealing what domestic abuse experts say has been the dirty little secret of the wealthy for too long.

From Stamford, Conn., to Beverly Hills, Calif., domestic violence in upscale communities has long had a unique stigma, the industry’s few experts say. “Higher-income people hide behind what I call a veil of silence,” says Dr. Susan Weitzman, founder of the Weitzman Center, an advocacy organization that raises awareness about what she calls upscale abuse. “They believe it’s only happening to them. No one can hear you scream on a 3-acre lot.”

Recent research on the relationship between domestic violence and the economy has focused on the effects of the 2008 recession and found that abuse is three times as likely to occur when couples are under financial strain. According to the National Network to End Domestic Violence, three of four domestic violence shelters reported increases in women seeking help after September 2008.
But Weitzman and her peers say there’s no comparable research for wealthy couples, reinforcing the public’s ignorance of the problem and the culture of silence surrounding upscale abuse.

“The woman may be living in an affluent household, but she often has as much access to finances as someone with no money at all.”

Frequent cycles of violence can characterize upscale domestic abuse, Weitzman says. Most abusive relationships include a so-called honeymoon period, in which the abuser tries to apologize with gifts and promises to change. But the wealthy clients Weitzman has worked with usually don’t experience a honeymoon period. The violence can be unrelenting, she says.

After the violence, the first unique obstacle wealthy women face in getting out of abusive relationships is admitting the abuse itself, an already harrowing task complicated by the fear—and often the reality—of not being believed by peers.

“The woman is often disbelieved when she comes out,” Weitzman says. “People will say, ‘Look at your husband, look at your lifestyle.’” Weitzman says she remembers one client whose abusive spouse poured a glass of water on her during a marriage counseling session.

“All the therapist did was offer the woman a Kleenex,” she says.

Linda Bollea, ex-wife of wrestler Hulk Hogan, says she knows the fear of coming clean about abuse all too well. In her memoir Wrestling the Hulk: My Life Against the Ropes, she alleges that her ex-husband
emotionally and physically abused her. (He has filed a lawsuit against her for defamation.)

Bollea recalls the anxiety that “the empire would collapse after ‘outing’ the abusive spouse. It makes it scary and difficult to ask for help. Once the abusive spouse realizes their partner’s unhappiness, it gets much more because now there is no fixing it.”

That problem is only compounded in the courtroom, where high-income husbands can assemble what Weitzman calls “legal dream teams.” She says she recently worked with a woman whose abusive husband hired six attorneys, each at $500 an hour, to fight for custody of his children.

Even when the abusers are subject to legal proceedings, they are adept at manipulating the system. During one court battle, Weitzman says, a husband accused of abuse was asked to have his car appraised by forensics experts. When the experts got to the garage, they found the car disassembled into thousands of pieces.

That campaign often involves stripping the abused woman of all her financial resources, says Jan Edgar Langbein, executive director of the Genesis Women’s Shelter in Dallas.

“The woman may be living in an affluent household, but she often has as much access to finances as someone with no money at all,” she says.

Expensive, painful custody battles are typical in cases of upscale domestic abuse, Langbein and Weitzman say.

“The abuser will try to hurt you in the way it hurts most, by getting custody of the kids,” Langbein says. According to data from the American Judges’ Association, 70 percent of contested custody cases involving domestic violence eventually grant joint or sole custody to the abuser.

Langbein says she is seeing more and more affluent women seeking help from Genesis’s non-residential programs, part of the overall
growth in domestic violence around the nation in the last five years. But Weitzman says there is some good news: the highest-profile cases, from Chris Brown to Pistorius, are raising awareness about the pervasiveness of upscale violence.

And some women’s shelters are developing specific programs for wealthy women. In 2007, a shelter in Naples, Fla., developed a “Women of Means” program. Similar programs have sprung up around the country, though Langbein says a nearby Dallas shelter with a separate program for affluent women has earned the disparaging moniker “the Prada group.”

David Hopkins, partner at Schiller DuCanto & Fleck, a family law firm based in Chicago, has been working for more than a decade to level the playing field for abused women facing expensive legal battles when their abusers sue for defamation or custody.

He says he’s worked with many clients with wealthy abusers. “In the most extreme cases, the abusive party is able to recoup irrespective of the cost,” he says. “The goal is to financially destroy the victim.”

To combat what he calls the “sheer vindictiveness” of unnecessary litigation against abuse victims, Hopkins helped pass statutory reforms to Illinois’s Marriage and Dissolution of Marriage Act so that victims would have equal access to finances to pay for legal fees.

Despite advancements in treatment for wealthy domestic violence victims and legal developments to help victims fight back, there’s much more work to be done to de-stigmatize upscale abuse, experts tell The Daily Beast.