Domestic Violence: The Causes and Effects of Why Women Stay

Most people have seen the “Elevator Knockout” video of Baltimore Ravens’ Ray Rice punching out his then fiancé, Janay Palmer, now wife in an elevator at a hotel casino. She received a massive blow that knocked her unconscious (Dockterman, Eliana). Instead of showing concern for knocking her out cold, Rice gives her an insensitive nudge then dragged her out of the elevator. His reaction towards the mother of his child is unspeakable! This story made headlines all over the media and has sparked nationwide conversations on Domestic Violence (Dockterman, Eliana). Social media buzzed heavily because of Janay Rice’s decision to stand by her man. The average woman, who has never been in an abusive relationship, may ask “why do abused women stay in abusive relationships.” Only victims of domestic violence can answer that question. Although, Janay Rice adamantly proclaimed that she is not in an abusive relationship, there are numerous women who have made the same decision to stay with their abusers. Skeptics say that Janay Rice’s decision is because of money. Others sympathize with her because of her love for running back, Ray Rice. She even said she’s the blame for what happened to her. Victims of domestic violence find it difficult to leave abusive relationships because of many factors, but the following seems to be the most common: financial dependency; not being able to support themselves and their children, psychological problems; blaming
themselves for what their abusers do to them, and fear; not knowing what will happen to them or their children if they try to leave.

Financial dependency is a common reason for abused women to stay in an abusive relationship because many of them depend on their abusers to support them and their children. According to a Forbes article, “Domestic Violence and Financial Dependency”, 85% of women who leave abusive relationships return (Salamone, Nancy). Women who don’t have strong support systems, such as family or friends, will return to their abusers (Causes, Effects). They may believe that they are better off staying than leaving. Oftentimes, the abuser has all control over the family finances; therefore, making it harder for victims to leave. Many women lack access to cash and credit resources to help them make it on their own (Causes, Effects). Most of the victims don’t own any property and are unemployed (Causes, Effects), which can be due to losing their jobs because of incidents of abuse. Unfortunately, many victims don’t know how or when to leave. This can be overwhelming and this can be devastating if not handled correctly. When a victim is considering to leave, an exit plan must be developed to ensure their safety and the safety of their children, get them help through a domestic violence program and have a place to live (Schweitzer, Don – DV: The Exit Plan).

The results of gaining financial independence is that many victims who leave their abusive relationship eventually return. They return because of financial reasons. They are not able to manage their money correctly because they never had to before; therefore, they return to the abusive relationship. In their minds, at least they and their children will be provided for with a roof over their heads, food on their table and clothes on their back. Often, the abuser will hold
this over the head of the victim and threaten her. Sadly, this provision is a reason for them to endure the abusive relationship.

Psychological and emotional problems are other causes of why women stay in abusive relationships. Abused women sustain physical injuries from their abusers, but in addition to suffering from physical problems, they suffer from mental problems, as well. Abusers criticize and humiliate their victims causing them to feel embarrassed. Abusers damage victim’s relationships with their children, isolate them from family and friends, and threaten their and their children’s lives (Domestic Violence-Opposing Viewpoints). These acts are used as a way to undermine the victim’s sense of self-worth. These acts are intended to lower the victim’s self-esteem thus making them emotionally dependent on their abusers. According to researchers, abused women also have distorted beliefs and perceptions that keep them in abusive relationships (Causes, Effects). They simply blame themselves for the violence and believe they can prevent the violence by changing their behavior. They do not consider that the blame should be placed on the person who is abusing them because the abuser makes it a point to deflect blame and avoid responsibility. Others see the abuse as normal and that it’s “not that bad” (Causes, Effects). If a woman fights back in self-defense, she views herself as the blame just as Janay Rice did. When victims have these distorted beliefs, most of them will not seek help to escape the vicious cycle of abuse, so they stay.

When victims of domestic violence stay with their abusers, they suffer from long term health problems. From the article, “Causes, Effects, and Prevention of Domestic Violence”, it states that women who are in abusive relationships may find it impossible to maintain their
personal physical health because they do not feel that they can be honest with their doctors in terms of what is happening in their lives:

In “Intimate Partner Violence and Physical Health Consequences” (Archives of Internal Medicine, May 2002), Jacquelyn Campbell et al. compare the physical health problems of abused women to a control group of women who had never suffered abuse. Abused women suffered from 50% to 70% more gynecological, central nervous system, and stress-related problems. Examples of stress-related problems included chronic fear, headaches, back pain, gastrointestinal disorders, appetite loss, and increased incidence of such viral infections as colds. Although women who most recently suffered physical abuse reported the most health problems, there is evidence that abused women remain less healthy over time because they are less likely to visit the doctor since many do not want to risk being asked pointed questions about what may be going on. It's extremely critical that these victims seek help to avoid these types of health problems because they need to stay as healthy as possible to continue taking care of themselves and their family members (Campbell).

Living in fear is a major reason women stay in abusive relationships. Not only do victims live in fear of losing financial support, breaking up their families and failing their marriages, many live in fear of being killed. “Fear is the greatest motivator” states Valerie Wynn, founder of a multi transitional housing unit for victims of domestic violence located in Nashville, TN. Mrs. Wynn made this comment in the April 1, 2013 documentary, “Domestic Violence: Living in Fear | NPT Reports.” In this documentary, NPT Reports (Nashville Public Television) talks to victims and experts on the subject. What seems to be echoed from the
The documentary was that the batterers or abusers had control over their victims therefore keeping them living in fear. Using fear in any situation pretty much guarantees a person will get what they want, and what an abuser wants is to keep their women in the relationship. An abuser may say to the victim “if you leave me, I will kill you.” The victims believe it especially if they hear it more than once, so they stay. The violence is escalated as soon as the victim decides to leave the relationship. For example, in many cases, the stalking will begin. The NPT Reports’ documentary mentioned that 76 percent of women killed by their abusers had been stalked prior to their murder (NPT Reports). From this report, it’s apparent the protection orders these victims had against their abusers failed them.

The most troubling effect that these women endure if they stay in abusive relationships in fear is the difficulty trying to survive every day of their lives. As suggested in “Causes, Effects, and Preventions of Domestic Violence”, women try to end the violence by talking to their partners about the violence, developing strategies for avoidance (being affectionate and finding ways to keep their partners calm), fighting back verbally and physically, telling others about the violence and temporarily leaving the relationships (Causes, Effects). These techniques may work for women who suffer minor abuse but may only work for a little while for women who are severely abused (Causes, Effects). The victims will even conform to the requests of their abusers by keeping silent about the abuse and portraying an image in public that everything is fine. They do this because they will do whatever it takes to survive. The harsh reality for their survival, as tragic and unfortunate as it may be, is that many victims end up taking the lives of their abusers. This compounds the problem because these women feel that they have no alternative but to kill someone else to survive. Often, these women lose their personal freedom as a result of resorting to such extreme measures to protect themselves. In doing so, these women also lose the ability
to continue to protect their family members who may be victims as well. It is clear that the decision abused women have to make in whether or not to leave their abusive partners is not an easy one. There are many factors that victims must consider when in an abusive relationship. For example, it is often impossible for many women to leave because they do not have access to money or shelter outside of their relationship. Regardless of the reasons why women stay, whether it’s because of financial dependency, psychological problems or absolute fear, the important fact remains and that is for them to get out of their abusive situation. President Obama signed the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) of 1994 on March 7, 2013, as a means of giving women and men access to resources they need in their communities to help heal from the trauma of domestic violence (Jarrett). VAWA will help recognize the violence in its early stages and help prevent domestic violence homicides (Jarrett). Programs such as Safe at Home, created by the Secretary of State’s Office, allows victims of domestic violence, stalking and other crimes to be able to hide their addresses from the public. Such programs are used to aid victims to keep them safe. This is just one of the many programs available for support. Failure to seek help has proven to be detrimental for victims because of the many cases of them being killed every day or they lose their freedom by taking the lives of their abusers. Victims must make a conscious effort and decision to get out of abusive relationships and realize no one ever has to live in fear. There are many programs in their communities that will help them if they only seek and ask for help. As difficult as this may be, it is often the first step to freedom for many women who experience the horror of domestic violence. For more information, go to https://www.domesticshelters.org/. Readers may also consider volunteering at an organization of their choice that assists victims of domestic violence.
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