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why don't they just  
leave



BY CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI | In the United States, October is the month designated to draw attention to domestic violence. But unless things take a miraculous turn for the better, this October, in the United States, every nine seconds a woman will be battered -- just as she is every other month of the year. Each year in the United States, approximately 4 million women are beaten, most of them by husbands or boyfriends. Such attacks result in more injuries than muggings, rapes (by strangers) and auto accidents combined.

Domestic violence is not a popular topic. (Some of you have already stopped reading this.) As a member of Maitri, a South Asian group against domestic violence in the San Francisco area, I know it very well. While other nonprofit groups in our community who raise money for flood victims or for literacy projects or events promoting culture among the second generation are generously welcomed, we are often greeted with stony faces or uncomfortable silence. When people talk to us, or -- as is more common -- talk about us to other people, these are some of the things they say:

SPICE  
OF  
LIFE

- Domestic violence may exist among other communities and ethnicities, but not in ours.
- Domestic violence is a terrible thing, of course, but since it primarily occurs among ill-educated working-class families, or among alcoholics and substance abusers, or in other countries, it doesn't really concern us.
- Marriage/relationship problems are private things and need to be resolved within the home. How do you know the woman didn't bring it on herself, anyway? When you encourage women to air their dirty linen in public, you're

helping to break up families.

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Why it's time  
for Mothers Who Think

- If a woman is in such a terrible situation, why doesn't she just leave?

Many complex answers, backed with eye-opening statistics, can be given to each of the questions above. Being a writer, I will offer, instead, a story from my own experience.

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