

# Victims of dating abuse find it hard to get help

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Corry Elyda

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After five years of surviving an abusive relationship, 22-year-old Luna (not her real name), learned the hard way that good things come to those who have self-respect.

"Every time he abused me, he always said he wouldn't have done it if I weren't a bad girl. After that, I would feel bad and ashamed," she said recently in an email interview with *The Jakarta Post*.

Luna said the relationship with her ex-boyfriend, whom she referred to as the "perpetrator", started to go downhill after the first six months, right after the two had sex. "After that I endured all kinds of violence, from verbal and financial to psychological and physical," said Luna, who graduated from the psychology department of a prominent Jakarta university.

Her boyfriend would beat her for minor things like not replying to text messages immediately. "He would find me and call me dirty names, while slapping or even hitting me until I had bruises," she said. During the hellish five years, Luna wore a long-sleeve shirt to hide the bruises.

Her boyfriend, who was three years older than her, often threatened to expose their "hot" pictures.

Now an assistant to a psychologist at a private elementary school, Luna said she was actually better looking, more financially stable and had a better background than him. But she somehow let her boyfriend abuse her over and over again. "Was it love? I don't know," she said.

Luna said she had tried to tell her friends about his abusive behavior. "Most of them did not believe me because the perpetrator seemed like a nice person in front of other people," she said.

Luna eventually got out of the relationship after she joined a community of young people working on human rights issues. The support from her new friends prompted her to seek help.

After leaving him, she received therapy. "The violence really affected me. I attempted suicide several times," she said.

Abuse among unmarried couples is less recognized than violence between husband and wife. However, statistics show that the problem warrants serious attention.

The National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan) reported this year that violence in dating was the second biggest source of violence against women after marital abuse.

Dating violence accounted for 21

## Violence against women

### 2014

- Total cases of violence against women in public and personal spheres: 293,220 (gathered from reports to religious courts and other institutions)
- Total cases in personal sphere: 8,626 cases
- Married: 5,102 cases (59%)
- Dating: 1,748 cases (21%)
- Against daughters: 843 cases (10%)

### 2013

- Total cases of violence against women: 279,760
- Total cases in personal sphere: 11,719
- Married: 7,548 cases (64%)
- Dating: 2,507 cases (21%)
- Against daughters: 844 cases (7%)

percent out of the total 8,626 cases of abuse that the commission gathered nationwide. Abuse between husband and wife accounted for 59 percent.

Charlie Chris Evan, a facilitator at Yayasan Pulih, a trauma counseling foundation, said abuse in dating could take many forms. "Abuse can be verbal, psychological, sexual even financial," he said.

He said couples should recognize signs of an abusive relationship because at first the abuse might seem less harmful like calling the partner an insulting nickname and mistaking it for a joke. "Calling partners insulting names and using words that make him or her uncomfortable is a form of verbal abuse," he said.

He also said that being overprotective and intimidating were forms of abuse. Charlie said victims tended to endure the violence as they considered it a form of loyalty. "They also have an inclination to not get out of the relationship because they think they deserve the abuse," he said.

Charlie said when abuse happened, the victim needed to take action. "He or she could talk with the perpetrator regarding the violence and look for psychological counseling," he said.

He said the victim could also seek help from organizations like Yayasan Pulih, One Billion Rising or the Indonesian Women's Legal Aid Foundation (LBH Apik). People close to the victim should also take notice and help. "When violence is involved, it is no longer a personal matter," he said.

Komnas Perempuan commissioner Mariana Amiruddin said that although the amount of violence in dating relationships was high, the victims did not have a specific legal avenue to press charges.

"The absence of a legal basis makes the victim more vulnerable," she said, adding that Law No. 23/2004 on domestic violence could not be used for abuse between unmarried couples.