

I want the people who see these pictures to feel close to the women in them. I want them to know that domestic violence is not just something that happens to other people; it permeates every social and cultural sphere. The violence can be verbal, psychological, physical and sexual. Its victims frequently experience a loss of self-esteem, while fear of provoking a new attack can lead to feelings of shame, guilt and a profound sense of failure. Women tend to keep silent about their plight, which compounds the isolation and can even result in psychological problems.

Women from any social background can be affected, yet my photographs are mainly of working-class and middle-class women because they are the ones that I met. I found my subjects through working with the police, and waiting in hospitals for women to be admitted. My decision to tackle the issue of domestic violence sprang from a need as a woman and as a photographer to draw attention to this subject, which has rarely been treated photographically in Europe. I spent long hours in discussion with social workers, psychologists, sociologists, teachers and police officers, who are in regular contact with abused women. I was lucky enough to receive funding for the project from the Secretary of State for

Women's Rights. It was agreed that an exhibition of the photographs would tour regional women's rights groups.

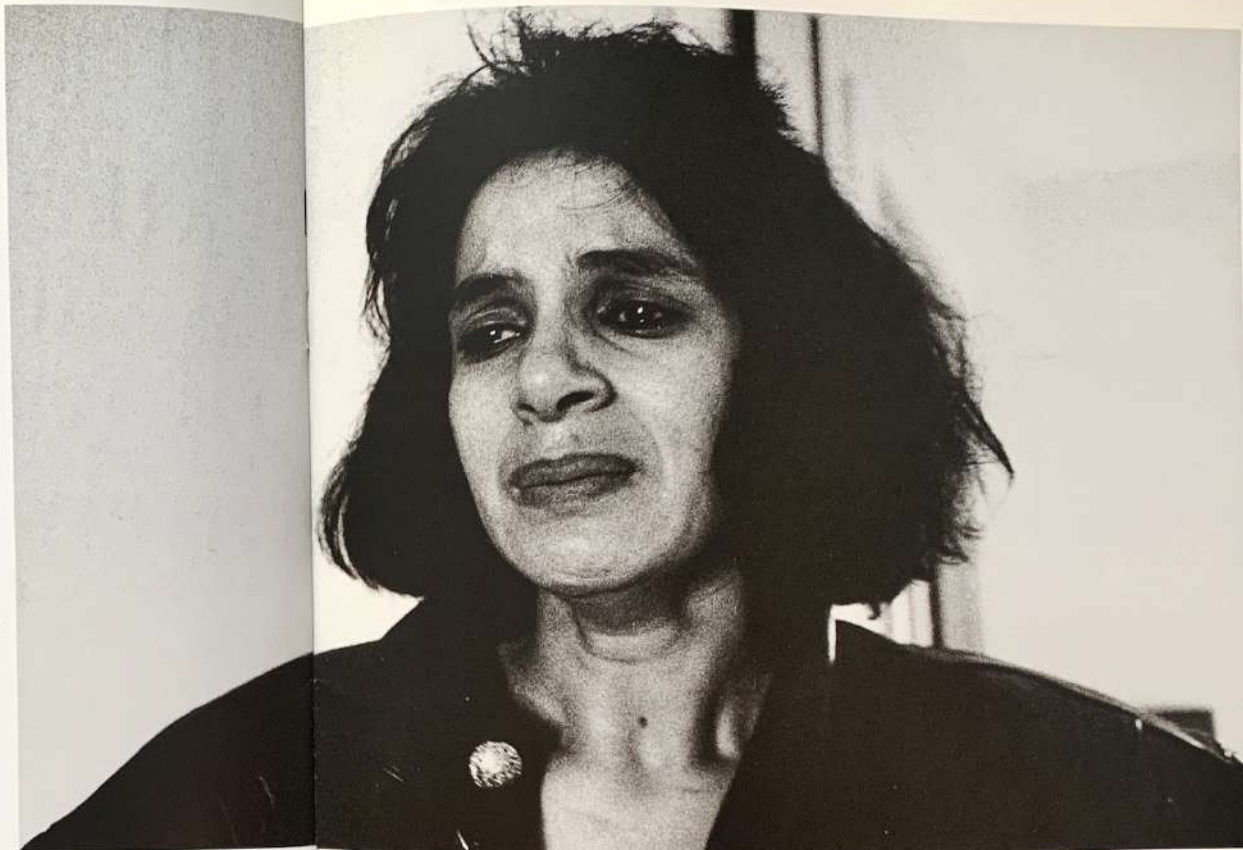
The idea that my photographs might make a difference gave me energy and motivation, and encouraged me to persevere. It has not been an easy task. Many people tried to persuade me to abandon the project. It is a subject most people would prefer to ignore.

I spent hours traipsing from one administrative office to another trying to get the necessary authorisation to take the photographs, dealing with officials in institutions from the Court of Appeal to the Ministry of Health. Eventually, I was granted permission to be present during police interventions in the home or at the police station, and I was allowed to photograph the work of the medico-legal services. I made contact with the battered women themselves, and with the men who had perpetrated the attacks. A few of the men were so aggressive I could feel no compassion for them; others were full of remorse. They weren't monsters. I learned that the process of violence sometimes involves the participation of both parties because of the way in which they manage their relationship. But clearly, it is the male partner who causes the injuries to the woman.

It took me two years to complete

the project. I witnessed the daily pain, humiliation and depression of women abused by their partners. I found that these women benefited from talking about their experiences, and I noticed that they became visibly calmer once they knew they could trust and confide in me. I was a social worker for 15 years and I think that helped me. To have their photograph taken seemed to give them courage; it boosted their confidence and maybe reinforced their determination to end the cycle of violence. In two years only two women refused to let me take their photograph — their attitude always seemed to be: "at least my problem can help other women".

I did not refrain from showing the faces of terribly battered women. I wanted to show that even if they were beaten, they were still women, still mothers. I wanted to give them their dignity back. By taking these pictures and confronting such a sensitive subject my intention has not been to shock or to pander to the voyeur. I have tried to photograph up close the daily lives of these women, men and children, revealing the pain, the hope, the sorrow and the joy. I hope the pictures provide an insight into their troubled and often marginalised lives. I believe I will have succeeded if, at the sight of the photographs there is, very simply, a rush of feeling from the heart.



Escape route: (left) Toulouse. This mother of four has just been beaten by her husband. He used to go out drinking every night and attack her on his return. When she told him she wanted a divorce and showed him papers from her lawyer he flew into a rage, hitting her and breaking a marble table four centimetres thick. She sent her children to a neighbour's house for refuge while police advised her to leave her husband

Breaking the silence

These women in France have been battered, beaten and abused. So why do they want their photographs taken? Photographer Lizzie Sadin tells how she found that her camera could be used as a weapon to remove the taboos that still surround domestic violence



Police persuasion: (left) Marseilles. Alerted by neighbours who heard a woman screaming, police arrive at this couple's home. The woman has been attacked and the police explain how to bring charges against her husband. Because the police have received training in defusing domestic disputes, they spend some time talking to the husband before they leave



Violent reactions: (above) Marseilles. This woman was beaten by her husband after a row about the electricity bill. He didn't want to pay; she insisted the baby needed a hot

bath. He hit her with glass bottles and a plant pot. An ambulance was called. Her four children are cared for by a neighbour while she is in hospital. If she

does not lodge a complaint he will not be brought before the courts



Damage assessment: (above) Jean Verdier Hospital, Bondy, north of Paris. A doctor examines a woman who has been savagely beaten. Her husband, who accused her of being unfaithful, tied her to the bathtub before beginning his assault. Although no bones are broken, the woman is traumatised and the doctor will assess her for a medical certificate. Without this it would be very difficult for her to pursue a successful court case against her husband

Marks of pain: (right) This woman was beaten for years and systematically tortured with a sharp blade



Bruised and battered: (left) North Hospital, Marseilles. This woman's injuries were caused by hammer blows. Later, her boyfriend was arrested carrying a gun. He had beaten her before, but this time she was afraid that he would kill her. She says that she will now lodge a complaint



Taking refuge: (left) Flora Tristan emergency shelter, Paris. A 14-year-old girl covers under a table, trying to blot out the memory of the violent attack on her mother which she has just witnessed. She and her mother came to the shelter to seek refuge from further abuse. They were later moved to temporary accommodation. They hope to find a permanent home where they cannot be found by the husband