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## Why do women lie about domestic violence? To protect their abusers

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**BY KRISTEN SCHORSCH** Staff writer

Beaten and burned, Kimberly Johnson was left to die.

Family members say an ex-boyfriend whom police charged with murder Wednesday is to blame for the crime.

Johnson's mother, Betty, said her daughter shared few details about who she was dating. She didn't know her daughter was being abused.

Domestic violence wasn't new to Johnson, 25, of Midlothian. Her current boyfriend smashed her cell phone and jammed the handle of a toilet brush down Johnson's throat earlier this month, police said.

So why defend an abusive lover? Why was Johnson so secretive about dating?

Victims often lie to protect their abusers, said Deborah Tucker, executive director of the National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence. They blame themselves, thinking they provoked a fight or a beating. Then they hide the hurt from family and friends, many times to protect them, too, Tucker said.

"You hide it if you are somehow feeling that perhaps you contributed to (abuse)," Tucker said. "You get convinced that if you just tiptoe around on egg shells and don't say this and do that that, it will never happen again, or you're threatened if you go to your family. Many times people do it to protect family, to keep them from potentially being a target."

Because Johnson had been abused before, it would have been even harder for her to talk about the latest batch of bruises and beatings, Tucker said.

"(It is) even more likely that she would think that people would judge her and think (the abuse) had something to do with her, rather than (the abuser's) conduct," Tucker said.

Betty Johnson said her daughter was private and had been spending time with suspected gang-bangers.

"She knew how we felt about the people she hung around with," Betty Johnson said, declining further comment.

On some level, many domestic violence victims realize they could die. Experts say they hear the same stories when victims seek help.

The look in his eye. Something was different. They finally were convinced - enough to flee - that they or their children were in danger, Tucker said.

But even if a victim leaves the first time she is abused - domestic violence victims usually are women - she often returns and accepts an apology if she has strong ties to her attacker, such as marriage or children, Tucker said.

Johnson isn't here to say what she was thinking. Her family says ex-boyfriend Lee Martin, 40, 3516 Roesner Drive, Markham, harassed her at work and once threw ammonia in her face. He now faces murder and arson charges for allegedly beating Johnson and setting her home in the 3500 block of West 147th Street on fire.

Abusers often chip away at victims' self esteem and social ties. They try to keep victims isolated, said Vickie Smith, executive director of the Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

"Beware of Prince Charming, someone who's always paying attention to you," Smith said. "All those things that we think when we're teenagers could be wonderful could be huge red flags ... for people who could abuse us."

But people who are abusers are very deliberate, Smith said. They seek out people they can control. And that can be deadly.

- \* One in every four women will experience domestic violence in their lifetime.
- \* About 1.3 million women are physically assaulted by an intimate partner every year.
- \* Women 20 to 24 years old are most likely to suffer nonfatal domestic violence by their partners.
- \* 85 percent of domestic violence victims are women.
- \* Women most often are victimized by someone they know.

Source: National Coalition Against Domestic Violence

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