



*Giving voice to the unspeakable...  
responding to domestic abuse in Jewish homes.*

## **CULTURAL BARRIERS TO SAFETY: WHY JEWISH WOMEN NEED SHALVA**

Every victim of domestic violence faces formidable barriers in seeking help, breaking free of the abuse and constructing a safe and tranquil life for herself and her family. Jewish women face all of these barriers, plus additional cultural factors that may cause them to wait longer before seeking help. These cultural norms hold **regardless of religious affiliation or income:**

- A commonly-held myth - that all Jewish men are good husbands, good providers, don't do drugs, don't abuse their wives or children - leads women to deny the reality of their lives.
- Negative stereotypes about Jewish women as demanding and overbearing can make women reluctant to seek help, further eroding their faith that others will believe and take them seriously.
- A commonly held belief that only Jewish women are responsible for *shalom bayit* (peace in the home), leading to a sense of failure and self-blame when abuse occurs.
- A communal reluctance to acknowledge the existence of domestic abuse that is documented as far back as the thirteenth century. This leads women to fear being disbelieved if they seek help.
- As a legacy of persecution and minority status, women fear creating a *shonda*, (an embarrassment) that could shame their family in the eyes of the community as well as disgrace the entire Jewish people in the eyes of the non-Jewish world.
- A fear that secular domestic violence agencies or shelters will not understand their religious or cultural needs or provide kosher food;
- A fear that the non-secular agency or shelter may celebrate non-Jewish religious holidays or demand forbidden activities on the Sabbath.
- Fear of loss of privacy and confidentiality in a tight-knit community. A fear that their children and extended family will be stigmatized.

*The Chicago Jewish community is diverse and each Jewish woman has different needs.  
SHALVA is uniquely qualified to address these differences and help each woman  
help herself break free of abuse.*