Juliana's Story

I was in a relationship with a man one year older than me, I met him in my first year of college and there was some pretty severe domestic violence involved. We were together for two years, and about a year and a half after the relationship ended, I had a five-minute phone call with Women's Aid. It was the first time I felt validation for what I'd gone through. It was the first time I felt like someone really took me seriously, understood what I was feeling and the damage that had been done. They advised me on what I should do next as well as giving me legal advice, they suggested therapy to begin to unravel the trauma I had endured.

I had amazing friends and family around me that were so supportive, but if you haven't been through it yourself or you're not trained to respond, I think it can be a complex topic to give good advice and support on. It was actually other people's reactions – which I knew I couldn't control – that stopped me from telling people. People's reactions made me feel insecure about what I'd gone through. It made me feel like I was over exaggerating. Or people didn't believe me, and if they did believe me, they just didn't think it was that bad. Because of this, I had to spend copious amounts of time around my ex-boyfriend, hear his voice and have him beside me constantly, which was really traumatising for me. I felt like I had to relive everything I had gone through each time I saw him, and I felt completely alone in doing so.

Something else that stopped me from telling people was this stereotype of a domestic abuse victim, a person who is damaged, delicate and frail, who isn't capable of having a healthy and functional friendship or relationship – which is obviously not true. I was afraid that if I publically identified as a domestic abuse victim, people would stereotype me like that, I'd walk into a room and that's all people would see, and that's not how it felt.

I'm now completely open about my story and one question I get all the time is: 'if you were getting abused why didn't you leave?'. It's a fair question if you haven't been through it yourself but for me, I was completely manipulated into believing that I would be on my own forever if I left this person, that all my friends hated me and that I had no other support network other than my abuser. My self-esteem was absolute rock-bottom and I was completely isolated, I had cut myself off from friends and family because of this relationship. The darkest thought I had was that I was going to marry this person, and this abuse might be how I was going to die, and I still stayed. So, that's how brainwashed you are. I accepted it and I stayed.

Every time I put up a post about domestic abuse or domestic violence, I get messages from women that I know and women that I don't, telling me they've gone through the same thing. It's so much more common than you'd think.