

Services for Male Victims of Domestic Violence: A Fact Sheet

Male victims of abuse are beginning to make themselves known and search for services.

Background

Healthy relationships are nonviolent and allow both men and women to express themselves without fear of being belittled, criticized or having their opinion diminished. The field of marriage education has looked to domestic violence experts to discern how to talk with couples about what is/is not healthy and what to watch for that could signal violence in a relationship. Marriage and relationship education (MRE) teaches skills to help change behavior and encourage mutual respect in a relationship. It is intended to address men and women equally. Little is publicly known about male victims of intimate partner violence, but researchers and providers are beginning to address this issue.

Services for domestic violence victims are a critical component of a community's response to violence and abuse in intimate relationships. The current array of community-based services grew from the efforts of grassroots advocates in the 1970s and 80s, who employed three primary strategies – securing emergency shelter and support services for abuse victims and their children; enhancing protections and safety, often by improving laws and justice system responses to domestic violence; and changing community attitudes and responses. While the primary focus of these advocacy efforts has been to respond to the needs of women being abused by a partner (or ex-partner), male victims of abuse are beginning to make themselves known and search for services.

This Fact Sheet will explore what the data tells us about men's experience of domestic violence, identify the obstacles to both disclosing their abuse and seeking services, and highlight challenges facing domestic violence programs striving to continue improving responses to male victims within their current service delivery frameworks. A list of resources is also included.

Trends - What We Know about Male Victims of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence (DV) is typically defined as a pattern of abusive behaviors – including physical, sexual, and psychological attacks as well as economic coercion – that adults and adolescents use against an intimate partner. It is characterized by one partner's need to control the other, and the intentional and instrumental use of a range of tactics to secure and maintain that control. Domestic violence includes behaviors that frighten, terrorize, manipulate,



hurt, humiliate, blame, often injure, and sometime kill a current or former intimate partner. This is the type of intimate violence most often reported to authorities, and domestic violence victims are more likely to seek social and health services as well as legal protections. Domestic violence, defined in this way, is most frequently perpetrated by a man against a female partner.

Some scholars have distinguished domestic violence from what has been termed “situational couple violence” and what a layperson might refer to as “fights that get out of control.” This is when a disagreement between a couple turns into an angry, two-way argument that then escalates into physical violence – e.g., hitting, shoving, biting or worse. In situational couple violence, intimate partners may use violence against each other to express anger, disapproval, or to control their partner in a particular situation or change their behavior, such as stopping a partner from drinking or using drugs, or being unfaithful. Situational couple violence, based on the research of Johnson and others, is as likely to be perpetrated by women as men, although women are still more likely to sustain injury.

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appear to have poor ability to manage their conflicts and/or poor control of their anger. These fights often involve the use of verbal abuse – cursing, yelling, and name-calling – and can involve high levels of jealousy, including accusations of infidelity. However, the violence and emotional abuse of situational couple violence are not accompanied by a chronic pattern of controlling, intimidating, or stalking behaviors and fear of one’s partner is typically absent. Both what is labeled situational couple violence and domestic violence are problematic and have no place in a healthy relationship; however, the latter is far more likely to result in injury or death and has historically been the focus of domestic violence intervention and prevention programs.

It is estimated that between 300,000 and 835,000 men are victims of intimate partner violence each year (compared to 400,000 to 1.3 million women).

The prevalence and incidence of abuse between intimate partners is difficult to fully measure as it often occurs in private and victims are reluctant to disclose such abuse to anyone because of shame or fear of reprisal. A significant amount of intimate partner victimizations are not reported to the police. In addition to the social stigma that inhibits victims from

disclosing their abuse, the varying definitions of abuse that are used from study to study make measurement challenging.

To further understand intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and stalking in the United States, the National Institute of Justice and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention jointly sponsored the National Violence Against Women Survey

(NVAWS). This national survey was conducted from November 1995 to May 1996, involved a sample of 8,000 women and 8,000 men, and collected data on women's and men's experiences with violent victimization. This study, although older, is one of the few studies that differentiates forms of violence against both men and women from childhood to adulthood. Such forms of violence included rape, physical assault, and stalking; rates of injuries and injured victims' use of medical services were also investigated. In addition, those respondents who disclosed victimization were asked detailed questions about the characteristics and consequences of their victimization, including injuries and use of medical services. Related to this discussion of services to male victims of domestic violence, key findings from the NVAWS include:

- 7.4% of surveyed men (as compared to 22.1% of surveyed women) reported that they were physically assaulted by a current or former spouse, cohabiting partner, boyfriend or girlfriend, or date in their lifetime; 0.9 % of surveyed men reported experiencing such violence in the previous 12 months.
- 24.8% of male physical assault victims reported being injured during their most recent physical assault (as compared to 39% of female physical assault victims)
- 13% or 71,778 visits to emergency rooms for injuries sustained during rape and/or physical assault visits were made by men in 1994. Women and men together made 557,929 visits to hospital emergency rooms for these injuries.
- Men living with male intimate partners experience more intimate partner violence than do men who live with female intimate partners. Approximately 23% of the men who had lived with a man as a couple reported being raped, physically assaulted, and/or stalked by a male cohabitant. Of the men who had married or lived with a woman as a couple, 7.4% reported such violence by a wife or female cohabitant.
- More than half (56.2%) of the men who reported being physically assaulted since age 18 were assaulted by a stranger; 29.9% were assaulted by an acquaintance; 16.6 % were assaulted by a current or former wife, cohabiting partner, girlfriend, or date; and 6.3% were assaulted by a relative other than a spouse. (Women assaulted as an adult are most likely to be attacked by an intimate partner or ex-partner.)
- 2.2 % of surveyed men and 8.1% of surveyed women reported being stalked at some time in their life. Stalking is defined here as requiring victims to feel a high level of fear. Approximately 1 million women and 371,000 men are stalked annually in the United States. The survey confirms previous reports that most victims know their stalker. Typically, women are stalked by current or former intimates, while men are nearly equally likely to be stalked by current and former intimates, acquaintances, and strangers. Very few women and men are stalked by a relative other than a spouse.

Key findings from other resources include:

- Males over the age of 12 experienced 101,000 nonfatal violent victimizations by an intimate partner in 2008. The rate of intimate partner violence against males was 0.8 victimizations per 1000 males age 12 or older.
- Of male homicide victims, in 2007, 2% were killed by a spouse or ex-spouse and 3% were killed by a girlfriend or boyfriend.
- In a study of 978 college women in California, 20% of the women surveyed admitted to physical aggression toward their male partners within a 5-year period. They reported that the most common reasons women gave for victimizing their male partner included: her partner was insensitive to her needs, she wanted to gain her partner's attention, and her partner was not listening to her.

Due to the differences in the definitions of domestic violence in data collection methods and the biases in sampling third parties and relying on self disclosure, it is difficult to get an accurate picture of the rates of domestic violence experienced by men. Researchers concur that violence against men tends to present in the form of situational couple violence, in which arguments escalate into physical aggression. Although there is not agreement among MRE practitioners and DV practitioners on how best to address this, there are resources available for men (and women) who are being abused by their intimate partner (See Resources).

Disclosure and Services Available

- **Reasons for failure to report.** The most common reason male victims had for not reporting their intimate partner victimization to authorities was because it was a "private or personal matter." This was the reason given about 50 percent of the time. This is the most common reason for both male and female victims; however, male victims used this reason in a significantly higher percentage.
- **Male victims are often reluctant to disclose being abused.** Like many female victims of abuse, male victims may fear that their complaints will not be taken seriously, that they will be blamed for their partner's violence, or that they might lose custody of their children if they tell anyone about the abuse. Many men are embarrassed to admit that they are being abused and fear being ridiculed, particularly those subscribing to traditional gender roles that say that the man

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should be the “head of the household” and “in control.” Further, when their partner’s abuse is primarily psychological and emotional, or verbal (rather than physical), they may feel that their experiences will be minimized as “not serious.” Given research reporting a high rate of domestic violence within the context of intimate homosexual partnerships among men, with 39% of those studied reporting at least one type of abuse by a partner over the last five years, some male victims may also fear homophobic attitudes and discrimination when they reach out for help.

- **Many male abuse victims are unaware of the legal options and protections available to them.** Male victims may assume that they are not eligible for legal services or protections due to their gender. In fact, state and federal domestic violence laws, like other laws and the protections they provide, are gender neutral. Despite this reality, when asked why they chose not to report their victimization to the police, the majority of victims physically assaulted by an intimate partner in the NVAWS said they did not think the police would or could do anything about their victimization, and 61.5% of the women and 45% of the men said the police would not have believed them.
- **Core services of most domestic violence programs include a 24-hour confidential crisis hotline.** These hotlines provide callers with information about legal options and referrals to a full range of community services. Most importantly, hotlines provide the caller with a safe – and private – place to talk about the abuse he or she is

experiencing while also providing support and information to help develop immediate and long-term safety plans. Hotline workers are increasingly being trained to use language that supports disclosure of abuse by men being victimized by a female partner and by victims being abused in same sex relationships.

- **Most domestic violence programs maintain a full set of community referrals that would be helpful to both male and female domestic violence victims.** These typically include listings of legal, medical, mental health and other professionals willing and able to provide assistance to victims of abuse on a pro bono or reduced rate basis. Just as with female abuse victims, these are the types of services and supports more frequently requested by male victims of domestic violence than emergency shelter.
- **Most programs provide other services and supports for male and female domestic violence victims and their families.** These other services may include regular support groups for victims of domestic violence (some have separate male and female support groups); court accompaniment; medical and social services advocacy; transportation to advocacy appointments; and community education and training. In some communities, specialized services have been designed for older survivors, abuse victims exposed to HIV/AIDS, victims of abuse within gay and lesbian relationships, and immigrant victims. An extensive network of batterers intervention programs has been developed over the past 15 years as well, most

commonly providing specialized groups for abusers within a coordinated community response and serving as a referral option for the courts.

- **Emergency shelter for male victims, although limited in some communities, is also available.** Shelters that utilize federal funding for domestic violence programs are prohibited from discriminating on the basis of age, handicap, sex, race, color, national origin or religion, although the law does allow for provision of gender-specific services where appropriate. Some domestic violence programs have a shelter facility or facilities that allow them to house male and female victims in a manner that ensures the necessary privacy and support for both. Other domestic violence programs provide emergency housing to male victims through other types of community shelter or through the use of hotel vouchers or host homes.
- **Recent efforts have focused on securing additional resources to respond to teens experiencing dating violence.** The high rates of reported violence and abuse in teen dating relationships, involving both girls and boys as victims and perpetrators, and increased awareness of its impact has led to the design, testing and replication of effective intervention and prevention efforts, including specialized programs for young people.
- **Domestic violence services remain limited in some places and for some populations, including men.** While some states have at least one domestic violence program in every county, there are many areas, particularly in rural, low population states, where a victim must

travel many miles to reach the nearest domestic violence shelter or support group or advocacy services. The lack of programs is particularly acute for Native American women and men and within migrant and immigrant communities. Access to services remains limited for victims with disabilities and older men and women in abusive relationships. Services for gay men and/or transgendered persons are emerging and domestic violence programs are working to enhance responses to these victims. (See Stop Abuse For Everyone in the Resources Section for more information.)

Definitions

These definitions are drawn from the domestic violence hotline and the scholarly research of Michael Johnson.

- **Domestic violence (DV)** can be defined as a pattern of behavior in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. Abuse is physical, sexual, emotional, economic or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviors that frighten, intimidate, terrorize, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, injure or wound someone. DV can happen to anyone of any race, age, sexual orientation, religion or gender. It can happen to couples who are married, living together or who are dating. Domestic violence affects people of all socioeconomic backgrounds and education levels.
- **Intimate Terrorism (IT)** is when one partner, typically the male, employs a variety of

physical, economic and psychological tactics and weapons in a general pattern of maintaining power and control over his intimate partner. These may or may not include physical acts of violence, though the threat of physical violence is often implicitly there. This is the kind of violence most domestic violence advocates refer to when using the term “domestic violence.”

- **Violent Resistance (VR)** is the use of violence in response to intimate terrorism, generally by women against their male perpetrators. The resistor may believe her attack will prevent further attacks, is long-overdue retribution, or, when it results in killing her partner, may be a desperate attempt to escape.
- **Situational Couple Violence (SCV)** It does not involve any attempt at general power and control but is typically provoked by a situation or incident when tensions or emotions get out of control, escalate and get physical as one or both partners react with violence. SCV may be initiated by either partner and is generally interactive. SCV is by far the most common type of couple violence. Johnson estimates that SCV is three to four times as common as intimate terrorism, and is probably more prevalent in dating relationships.

This is a product of the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center, led by co-directors Mary Myrick, APR and Jeanette Hercik, Ph.D., and project manager, Patrick Patterson, MSW, MPH.

Resources

DOMESTIC ABUSE HELPLINE FOR MEN AND WOMEN

1-888-7HELPLINE

1-888-743-5754

www.dahmw.org

The Domestic Abuse Helpline for Men and Women (DAHMW) is a registered non-profit organization that provides intervention and support services to victims of domestic abuse. They are a unique organization specializing in offering support and services to male victims of spousal and intimate partner violence. However, their services are not limited to abused men, but they also offer support and services to women in abusive relationships.

NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE

800-799-SAFE

800-787-3224 (TTY)

www.ndvh.org

The National Hotline provides support to victims in crisis and those trying to assist them. The hotline is a particularly important resource for victims living in areas in which there are no local services or for victims exploring relocation. Assistance is available in English and Spanish with access to more than 140 languages through interpreter services.

NATIONAL TEEN DATING ABUSE HELPLINE

866-331-9474

866-331-8453 (TTY)

<http://loveisrespect.org>

The Helpline and loveisrespect.org offer real-time

one-on-one support from trained Peer Advocates who offer support, information and advocacy to those involved in dating abuse relationships, as well as concerned parents, teachers, clergy, law enforcement and service providers.

NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (NRCDV)

The NRCDV has organized a number of key resources designed to support domestic violence intervention and prevention efforts at the local, state and national level. See <http://www.nrcdv.org/resources/index.php>. For other information and technical assistance, contact the NRCDV at 800-537-2238 (ext. 5) or www.nrcdv.org.

STOP ABUSE FOR EVERYONE (SAFE)

SAFE has developed a specialized databank of national and state services and legal resources for male victims of domestic violence and operates an online SAFE Support and Discussion Forum. Information can be found at <http://www.safe4all.org>. SAFE can also be reached at 503-853-8686.

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