



ONE IN THREE VICTIMS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE IS MALE



Fact Sheet No.4

Is men's violence towards women most often an attempt to control, coerce, humiliate or dominate by generating fear and intimidation, while women's intimate partner violence (IPV) is more often an expression of frustration in response to their dependence or stress, or their refusal to accept a less powerful position?

International studies show that,

- Dominance by either partner is a risk factor for IPV (both minor & severe). It is the injustices and power struggles that are associated with inequality in relationships that give rise to violence, not just the inequality of male dominance^{1 2 9 13}

“The results of this study suggest important conclusions about two widely held beliefs: that partner violence is an almost uniquely male crime and that when men hit their partners, it is primarily to dominate women, whereas partner violence by women is an act of self-defence or an act of desperation in response to male dominance and brutality. These beliefs were not supported by the results of this study.”⁹

- Empirical research on American couples has found that the vast majority of relationships involve equal power between partners. Relationships in which one partner is dominant are in the minority, and are just as likely to be female-dominant as male-dominant⁹.
- Egalitarian couples are the least violent, while both male and female dominance are associated with increased IPV¹³
- Both husbands and wives who are controlling are more likely to produce injury and engage in repeated violence⁵
- Coercion (control and domination) is a frequently cited reason by women for their own use of IPV, and by male victims for their partner's use of IPV⁹

“Abuse was not just a sum of violent acts, but in almost all cases it constituted a system that was imposed upon the abused spouse, that dominated his whole life. The study reported that abusive women assumed total control of the relationship, e.g. by getting hold of power producing resources, imposing themselves upon the husband by enforcing authority over him or indirectly making serious threats to frighten him into submission.”¹⁰

- Even in research samples selected for high rates of male aggression (such as shelter samples), women sometimes report using comparative frequencies of controlling behaviour^{7 9}

“Partner violence is more a gender-inclusive systemic problem than it is a problem of a patriarchal social system which enforces male dominance by violence.”¹³

- Risk factors for IPV for both women and men include dominance, but also include youthfulness, self-defence, angry and antisocial personalities; alcohol and illicit drug use; conflict with partner; communication problems; criminal history; jealousy; negative attributions about the partner; partner abuse, sexual abuse and neglect histories; relationship satisfaction; stressful conditions; depression; traditional sex-role ideology and violence approval^{2 9 11}.
- Factors associated with the use of controlling behaviours include socioeconomic status, ethnicity, education level, age and length of marriage (but not gender)⁵
- Female IPV is not a response to male aggression but, like male IPV, follows developmental trajectories including crystallising into personality disorders. Aggressive girls grow up to be aggressive adults (as do aggressive boys)¹
- After analysing for verbal aggression, fear, violence and control by each gender, husbands are found to be no more controlling than wives^{1 2 7 9 13}. Men and women may differ in their methods of control, but not their motivation to control⁵. Men are more likely to prevent their partner from knowing about or having access to family income even when they ask; and prevent their partner from working outside the home. Women are more likely to insist on knowing who their partner is with at all times; insist on changing residences even when their partner doesn't want or need to; and try to limit their partner's contact with family and friends. Relatively few men or women engage in any of these controlling behaviours⁴.

“The... hypothesis that dominance by either partner, not just the male partner, is a risk factor for violence was also supported. In fact, this study found that dominance by the female partner is even more closely related to violence by women than is male-dominance. The results on dominance as a risk factor for violence, like the results on symmetry and asymmetry in perpetration, apply to both minor violence and severe violence. This contradicts the belief that when women hit, the motives are different, and that male-dominance is the root cause of partner violence. Thus, the results in this paper call into question another basic assumption of most prevention and treatment programs.”¹³



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“The same distortion of the scientific evidence by selective citation applies to discussion of dominance and control. Only studies showing male use of violence to coerce, dominate, and control are cited despite a number of studies showing that this also applies to violence by female partners.”³

- Controlling behaviours exhibited by abusive women include
 - the use of threats and coercion (threatening to kill themselves or their husbands, threatening to call the police and have the husband falsely arrested, threatening to leave the husband)
 - emotional abuse (making the victim feel bad about himself, calling him names, making him think he is crazy, playing mind games, humiliating him, making him feel guilty)
 - intimidation (making him feel afraid by smashing things, destroying his property, abusing pets, displaying weapons)
 - blaming the men for their own abuse or minimising the abuse
 - using the court system to gain sole custody of the children or falsely obtain a restraining order against the victim
 - isolating the victim by keeping him away from his family and friends, using jealousy to justify these actions
 - controlling all of the money and not allowing the victim to see or use the chequebook or credit cards⁹
- In a large recent Canadian study, victimisation by repeated, severe, fear-inducing, instrumental violence (often called intimate terrorism) was reported by 2.6% of men and 4.2% of women in the last five years. Equivalent injuries, use of medical services, and fear of the abuser were also discovered, regardless of the gender of the perpetrator and the victim¹.

Do men who are violent in intimate relationships typically underreport their violence?

International studies show that,

- Both sexes tend to over-report minor acts of violence they commit, under-report serious acts they commit, and over-report serious acts they suffer²
- The same results are obtained regarding the relative frequency of men's and women's violence regardless of whether men or women are the ones being questioned².

“The rate of minor assaults by wives was 78 per 1,000 couples, and the rate of minor assaults by husbands was 72 per 1,000. The Severe assault rate was 46 per 1,000 couples for assaults by wives and 50 per 1,000 for assaults by husbands. Neither difference is statistically significant. As these rates are based exclusively on information provided by women respondents, the near equality in assault rates cannot be attributed to a gender bias in reporting.”¹²



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