



Intimate Partner Abuse of Men

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Introduction

The Men's Advisory Network (MAN) has been concerned for some time that there are no dedicated support services in WA for men who are the victims of intimate partner abuse and violence.

MAN received funding from Lotterywest to investigate the nature of intimate partner abuse of men. Researchers from the School of Psychology at Edith Cowan University are undertaking the study. A summary of the preliminary findings from the interviews are contained in Attachment 1.

This presentation provides background information on the politics behind the study and is a case study of a public policy issue that has still not been successfully resolved.

Intimate Partner Abuse of Men

There is a sizeable minority of male victims, who are not being recognised and supported.

The abuse may take various forms including physical, intimidation, threats, sexual, emotional, psychological, financial, property damage and social isolation.

Men have traditionally been seen only as the perpetrators of domestic violence – there is very little recognition that they can also be abused.

Partly that has been because men are reluctant to admit they have been abused. They might feel embarrassed or ashamed to ask for help.

Police and hospital emergency services do not expect to see abused men and do not know how to identify or deal with these kinds of cases – it is completely off their radar.

MAN Submissions

MAN made its first submission to the WA government on the issue in 2003. This was followed in 2004 by a submission on the Domestic Violence Bill; the 2005-06 state strategic plan; plus a review of the legislation in 2006.

Submissions were also made to:

- Western Australian Council of Social Services pre-budget submissions in 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009
- 2020 Summit
- [National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children 2008](#)
- [All political parties prior to the WA state election in 2008](#)

None of these submissions has resulted in the provision of any services for male victims.

Some people misinterpreted the submissions as denying that men were perpetrators, or that we were advocating reduced funding to programs that supported women who were victims.

All the submissions that MAN makes are sent to all members of parliament. As a result of the 2004 submission on the Domestic Violence Bill, one powerful politician said that:

We will have to agree to disagree, because there is no evidence to support your implication that the difference in reporting of incidences is so distorted as to suggest that men are not the perpetrators of violence against women in the family in the vast majority of cases.

You re-assert that "MAN does not consider men to be the "vast majority" of adult users of violence in their personal relationships" in your email below. If that is the position of MAN I cannot provide further support, because that is inaccurate and frankly offensive.

Lets leave it at that , I really am not interested in meeting to discuss it, as I do not consider these facts in respect to domestic violence to be debatable.

Australian Bureau of Statistics Personal Safety Survey

The extent of the problem was identified by the Australian Bureau of Statistics survey on personal safety that was released in August 2006¹. Some of the relevant findings include:

- Of those women and men who experienced current partner violence since the age of 15, 70% (160,100) were women and 30% (68,100) were men
- Of those women and men who experienced violence from a previous partner 76% (1,135,500) were women compared to 24% (367,300) who were men
- Of those women and men who were physically assaulted by their current or previous partner of the opposite sex during the previous 12 months, 78% (74,000) were women and 22% (21,200) were men.
- 67% (125,100) of assaults by the opposite sex in the home were on women, with 33% (60,900) on men
- Of the 195,300 women who experienced physical assault by a male perpetrator, 64% (125,100) of incidents occurred in a home

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (4906.0 - Personal Safety, Australia (Re-issue), 2005

- Of the 79,500 men who experienced physical assault by a female perpetrator, 77% (60,900) of incidents occurred in a home
- Of those women who experienced physical assault by a female perpetrator, 38% (25,300) were assaulted in a home
- The most common location for physical assaults to occur for women was in the home irrespective of the sex of the perpetrator (64% of physical assaults were by male perpetrators and 38% of physical assaults were by female perpetrators).

These statistics have been rejected by the government on the basis that the standard error in some cases was as large as 50% due to the small sample. This means that for the first item above where the survey found 30% of the victims to be men, the real figure would be somewhere between 15% and 45%.

Even the low figure of 15% should warrant the provision of some support services.

The 2005 Personal Safety Survey involved 11,900 females and 4,600 males.

It is also worth noting that the statistics that are quoted to justify the current family and domestic violence services are from the 1996 Women's Safety Survey. This survey collected information from approximately 6,300 women. There is apparently no concern with the standard error when using the results of this survey.

The Men's Project

The *Western Australian Family and Domestic Violence State Strategic Plan 2004 – 2008* identified the need to conduct further research examining abuse experienced by men.

The Men's Project – Exploring Responses to Men Who Are Victims or Perpetrators of Family and Domestic Violence is a project report undertaken by the Department for Community Development's Family and Domestic Violence Unit and released in 2006.

In relation to men as victims of intimate partner violence the report identified that:

“The debate about male victims is a highly contested area. The controversy stems from the notions of what constitutes a male victim of domestic violence.” (DCD, 2006:31)

The report also identified that definitional issues exist in relation to the violence experienced by men and how these impact on the ability to enumerate the total population. The following excerpts from the report illustrate some of the difficulties.

“The issue of male victims must be debated and, as far as possible, resolved. Clear consensus needs to be sought on what is meant by a male victim so that effective responses can be developed.” (DCD, 2006:48)

“More thorough research is required in order to debate properly the notions of male victims of domestic violence and to obtain a clear understanding of what would constitute appropriate responses.” (DCD, 2006:35)

The difficulty lies in the fact that men's experiences tend to be offered by a third party and are largely anecdotal, which presents a challenge for researchers. More thorough research is required in order to debate properly the notions of male victims of domestic violence and to obtain a clear understanding of what would constitute appropriate responses.” (DCD, 2006:35)

The Men's Project suggested the following responses with regard to male victims:

- *“Engage in research partnerships with universities to ascertain the number and prevalence of male victims of domestic violence.*
- *Develop good-practice guidelines for identifying and responding to male victims of family and domestic violence.*
- *Develop and provide training for health professionals to acknowledge male victims of domestic violence and provide appropriate responses*
- *Create appropriate referral pathways for male victims of domestic violence to existing services.” (DCD, 2006:25)*

It is worth noting that the report was released six months after it had been written. This suggests some major review, either within the Department or the Minister's Office.

The Study of Intimate Partner Abuse of Men

The study was a direct result of the recommendation from the Men's Project report.

However, MAN's preferred course of action was to conduct an action research project involving the delivery of a pilot project to provide support services for male victims, plus a therapeutic program for the women who were using violence and abuse.

Undertaking the study will hopefully convince government that services have to be provided. On the other hand it could be a detour that has delayed other action by a couple of years.

Following discussions with the Family and Domestic Violence Unit, MAN established a steering committee for the study that met for the first time in May 2007. The membership of the steering committee was drawn from:

- Family and Domestic Violence Unit
- Men's Domestic Violence Helpline
- Department for Child Protection
- DVAS Central
- Aboriginal Legal Service
- Fremantle Multicultural Centre Inc
- Same Sex Domestic Abuse Group
- Northern Suburbs Community Legal Centre
- Curtin University
- Monash University

The aim of the study is to help paint a clear picture of what constitutes abuse, what might prevent men from reporting it and what is needed to support male victims.

Lotterywest approved a grant to undertake this research.

The WA Police and the Department of Health have agreed to assist the study by providing relevant data.

The Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs has indicated an interest in being kept informed.

The steering committee prepared a study brief that was sent to several university departments in Western Australia, which were invited to put forward a proposal. Very few submitted a proposal.

Context of the research

The following is an extract from the study brief:

Identifying the number of men who experience domestic violence perpetrated by intimate partners, or former partners, will be a complex exercise. While it is generally acknowledged that some men experience violence perpetrated by their intimate partners, the nature, extent and impact of this violence is largely unexplored. The purpose of this research is to explore men's experiences of intimate partner violence.

Existing definitions of domestic violence generally accepted by service providers rely on more than a single act of violence or abuse. These definitions identify that the context within which the violence occurs, and its impact, are important indicators of a pattern of abuse.

Much of the existing research on men's experiences of domestic violence identifies that a single physical act of abuse has occurred and does not explore the context or impact. This methodological difference has limited the ability to accurately compare the experiences of men and women.

Contemporary literature also identifies that violence that occurs between intimate partners can also be mutual, retaliatory or opportunistic. The literature generally does not recognise these forms of violence and abuse as domestic violence because they may not involve one person seeking to exert control over another or result in a person living in fear. This violence may also be a response to a prolonged experience of abuse.

The research being proposed by this project seeks to examine the violence and abuse experienced by men within intimate partner relationships. To do this the research will need to examine the context and impacts of the violence and abuse being experienced by men.

Edith Cowan University

Professor Alfred Allan and Dr Greg Dear of the School of Psychology at Edith Cowan University were engaged as the research partners to undertake the study

The study uses a grounded theory approach. This entails building an explanatory model based on the data that is collected and comparing and contrasting this new model with existing theories. This is in contrast to a conventional approach that starts from using the theories identified in the literature review and then collecting data in order to test these existing theories.

The initial phase of the study was to interview victims, family and friends plus service providers. This has been completed and the preliminary findings are contained in Attachment 1.

The researchers had difficulty in recruiting people to participate in the interviews from the Aboriginal, culturally and linguistically diverse and gay communities.

The second phase involves a survey of service providers and is currently being conducted.

The study should be completed by March 2009 and a report will be released.

Resource People

It is clear that the state government has vastly greater resources than MAN. In order to even up the playing field MAN has enlisted the pro-bono support from a number of interested people from around Australia. They have provided invaluable advice on the initial brief, the selection of the university, the study design, interview format and survey questionnaire.

Probably the most challenging and useful role for these people will be to provide advice on the strategies to be adopted to implement the findings.

Intimate Partner Abuse of Men

Preliminary Findings

*Provided by Emily Tilbrook, Senior Research Assistant,
School of Psychology, Edith Cowan University, WA*

Experiences of Abuse

Conceptualisations of Intimate Partner Abuse

- Included all forms of abuse (such as physical, psychological, emotional, sexual, verbal, financial and social isolation)
- Involved one person in an intimate relationship (married, defacto or dating) inflicting these forms of abuse on the other person in the intimate relationship

Forms of Intimate Partner Abuse Experienced

- Individuals experienced multiple forms of abuse
- Men experience all forms of abuse including physical abuse, verbal abuse, psychological/emotional abuse, financial abuse, sexual abuse and social isolation
- Legal/administrative abuse i.e. the use of institutions to inflict further abuse on an intimate partner e.g a Violence Restraining Order or not allowing an intimate partner access to his children***

***Not identified elsewhere in the literature as a form of intimate partner abuse

Context of the Abuse

- Perpetrator trying to gain control
- Victim trying to protect his children
- Arguments about children

Personal Factors (Perpetrator)

- Alcohol use
- Mental illness/disorder (this was either diagnosed or suspected)
- Childhood factors
- History of perpetrating abuse in a previous relationship
- Offence history
- History of violence with people they were not in an intimate relationship with
- History of being a victim in past intimate partner relationships

Personal Factors (Victim)

- History of being a victim in past intimate partner relationships
- Personality
- Upbringing
- Vulnerability (either physical or emotional)

Impacts of the Abuse

Impact of Abuse on Self

- Emotional (most commonly occurring impact)
- Loss of contact with children
- Concern about children post separation
- Suicide ideation
- Loss of contact with step children
- Use of alcohol or other drugs to cope with the abuse
- Physical injuries
- Loss of work
- Loss of home
- Physical illness

Impact of Abuse on Others

- Children of the male victim and/or female perpetrator
 - Children experiencing the abuse themselves
 - Developmental delays perceived to be a result of witnessing the abuse
 - Loss of adequate contact with one of their parents.
- Extended family members and close friends of the male victim
 - Personally experiencing the abuse
 - Loss of contact with grandchildren

Disclosure of the Abuse

Barriers to Disclosure

- Fear that abuse would be escalated if the man talked about the abuse
- The idea of having silent voices
 - Perception of not being heard
 - Experience of not being heard
 - Lack of available services
- Shame
- Perceptions regarding masculinity
 - Personal perception of masculinity
 - Perceived family expectations of masculinity
 - Perceived societal expectations of masculinity
- Perceptions of gender bias
 - Perceived service provider bias
 - Perceived societal bias
- Protection of spouse
- Protection of family unit
- Protection of children
 - From partner becoming abusive, or more abusive after break-up
 - From losing adequate contact with their mother
 - Not wanting children to have a negative perception of their mother
- Avoidance of re-experiencing emotions associated with the abuse
- Uncertainty about help seeking
 - Where to seek help
 - How to seek help
 - Knowledge of financially viable services
- Not realising that abuse has occurred
- Avoidance of creating a fuss or drawing attention to self

Facilitators of Disclosure

- Feeling heard
- Empathetic service providers
- Knowledge of others with similar experiences
- Acceptance by
 - Family members
 - Friends
 - Service providers
- Support from
 - Family members
 - Friends
 - Service providers
- Fear of escalation
- Fear of restricted contact with children
- Protection of children from
 - Experiencing abuse
 - Witnessing abuse
- Protection of other family members from
 - Experiencing abuse
 - Witnessing abuse
- Publicly available information
- Realising that abuse has occurred