

The 'minority' man?

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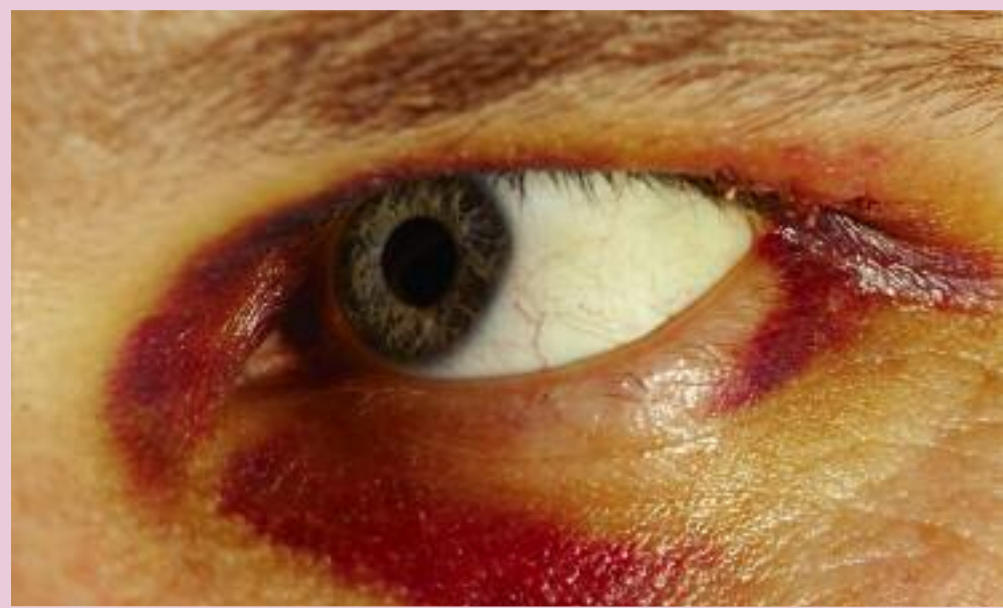
What do you think of when you hear the term 'intimate partner violence'? Is it an image of an aggressive, controlling perpetrator and a fearful, submissive victim? Is that image of a female perpetrator and their fearful male partner? For many, the more prominent image would be of an aggressive male perpetrator and their victimised female partner (Dutton & White, 2013). This view highlights the influence of gender stereotypes within society, as well as media coverage and an emphasis within domestic violence research of female survivors. In 2011 I embarked upon my first year of training in counselling psychology and was, as many trainees may identify, faced with the first hurdle of the doctorate – securing my first placement. This led me to a local charity that provided services to female survivors of domestic violence. Here I began a domestic violence training course, heavily influenced by the feminist model. Although this training provided insight into the different types of abuse within families and intimate relationships, I couldn't help thinking it seemed a rather biased approach, with men predominantly painted as the aggressive, controlling perpetrators.

As happenstance would have it, the funding for placement opportunities at this service ran out and I found myself in another service, which, quite significantly, provided

therapy and support to both male and female survivors. This placement developed my personal understanding of intimate partner violence (IPV) as a human issue rather than a gender issue. Learning about the plight of male survivors and the added stigma they face planted the seed for my doctoral research. Over the following three years I immersed myself in the literature of IPV and the

experiences of men who have lived through it. After two years at this placement, which provided support for men in an area where no equivocal service is available, the funding was sadly cut and it has now ceased to exist. This experience, as well as the many stories of female-perpetrated partner violence that I have heard through my research and practice, added to my drive to promote the voice of male survivors. Ultimately, my ambition is to influence societal beliefs about IPV towards a balanced, gender-informed stance.

The emphasis upon female survivors within academic literature and the media is indicative of over 40 years of campaigning for women's rights to support in IPV situations. Pizzey et al. (2000) make reference to the 'ultra feminists' who aspired to define women as a victim group oppressed by men. After Erin Pizzey announced in a lecture that 62 per cent of the women seeking refuge



What the statistics can't demonstrate is the shame and emasculation that ultimately prevents countless men from reporting intimate partner violence

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in the shelter were as violent as their male partners, she was condemned by the ultra-feminist movement (Pizzey et al., 2000). Indeed, the notion that women could also be perpetrators was so controversial that early researchers discussing this received death threats (Straus, 1999). The aggressive dynamics playing out between researchers and campaigners appear to be a repetition of the aggressive relationship dynamics of the very subjects they were campaigning for. Thus, early research into IPV indicated a clear, controversial split between those believing it to be a gender issue, with men being the dominant aggressors, and those believing it to occur more equivalently between the sexes.

Recently there has been media coverage on 'police failings' in IPV situations, highlighting poor leadership and direction and insufficient victim care. However, what is striking in the media coverage of this issue is the emphasis upon female victims, with very little mention of male victims, only to state they are in the minority. Indeed, research in the northeast of England reported that the majority of IPV perpetrators recorded by the police were male and their victims predominantly female (Hester, 2013). So while it is true that the statistics suggest that male victims are in the minority, it is in my nature as a counselling psychologist to seek the story behind their face value. What the statistics can't demonstrate is the shame and emasculation (McCarrick, Davis-McCabe & Hirst-Winthrop, in press) that ultimately prevents countless men from reporting IPV.

Although I believe there is still a way to go in promoting the voice of male survivors, my ambition has been supported recently by media coverage, such as an advertising campaign promoting male survivors by Essex Police aired during last year's World Cup matches. The BPS has also written a response to the NICE draft consultation on preventing and reducing IPV (BPS,

2011; NICE, 2011). In this response, the BPS have rightly highlighted that domestic violence affects men and women across the lifespan. Subsequently the published NICE recommendations for domestic violence (NICE, 2014) refer to both men and women. However, how will this translate within a society that, for 40 years, has predominantly cast men as the sole perpetrators of domestic violence? The current article seeks to understand the reasons underpinning the overarching societal beliefs around gender and IPV and why male victims are evidently viewed as 'the minority man'. Finally, as a big believer in 'actions speak louder than words' I shall also point towards some recommendations for how we, as a society, should address this plight.

Effects of gender roles and stereotyping

The overarching societal belief of what it means to be male or female is influenced by gender stereotypes. Addis and Mahalik (2003) refer to the emotional stoicism and toughness that is applauded as a positive aspect of masculinity. Steinmetz (1978) highlights the culturally prescribed norms ascribed to gender, making reference to comics in which husbands deviate from their norm of being strong, assertive and intelligent, thus making their wives justified in chastising them for not living up to their ascribed gender role. These gender-role stereotypes are so entrenched that, historically, when people deviate from them there has been a price to pay. This has been documented historically by making men who were victimised by their wives into the objects of ridicule, with a medieval European practice called *charivari*, which involved riding the male victim of IPV on a donkey around town and punching his genitals (George, 1994).

Dutton and White (2013) make reference to the stereotype underlying 'domestic violence' of a bullying, domineering man who intimidates and assaults their non-violent female partner.

Stereotypes of male aggression have some grounding, with a meta-analysis finding men were more likely to inflict an injury than women in intimate, heterosexual relationships (Archer, 2000). However, this study also found that women were slightly more likely to use one or more acts of physical aggression than men. Additionally, more recent research has examined more closely the differences between male and female aggression. Where boys are more likely to engage in overt aggressive behaviours such as a physical or verbal assault, girls have been shown to display forms of indirect aggression, such as gossip (Hess & Hagen, 2006).

Gender biases are highly influential in affecting people's perceptions of the severity of IPV. A large-scale study (Sorenson & Taylor, 2005) found that acts were more likely to be perceived as abusive if they were executed by men. Qualitative research that examined the experiences of counsellors working with male survivors of female-perpetrated IPV (Hogan et al., 2012) also reported a lack of recognition within society that men can also be affected by IPV. In this study the lack of recognition influenced the client's willingness to identify themselves as victims/survivors of IPV. Additionally, research by Follingstad et al. (2004) highlighted that this gender bias is also true of psychologists, with rates of a husband's behaviours being judged as more psychologically abusive and severe than the wife's use of the same actions. Thus, even psychologists, with their focus on the study of human behaviour, are not immune from gender biases, indicating the need for further research and promoting awareness of men's experiences of IPV. The inclusion of a taught workshop on doctoral training programmes, or as part of qualified psychologists' continuing professional development, addressing the experiences of male and female survivors would be helpful in order to begin to address this bias. Thinking about local domestic violence services, it is my view, as a

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