

Common Questions About Domestic Abuse Against Men

Q: Why haven't I heard much about this problem?

A: A number of factors contribute to the lack of awareness about domestic violence against men. Men know that there is little support they will receive if they tell others they were abused by their girlfriends or wives, and are more likely to be ridiculed than taken seriously. Men are expected to take abuse "like a man" and not complain.

There are many social messages which tell us that it is OK for a woman to hit a man. On television, women slapping men in the face or kicking them in the groin is often portrayed as a justifiable act, sometimes even as humor. Rather than thinking that a woman hitting a man is violence, we are led to think, "he must have done something rude to her to deserve being hit."

This double standard also contributes to the under-reporting of domestic violence against men. Both men and women are much less likely to think of it as a crime for a woman to hit a man than the other way around.

Sadly, the women's movement, which has done an incredible job of raising awareness of domestic violence against women, has not been particularly supportive of abused men. Erin Pizzey, a founder of the battered women's shelter movement, has been very outspoken about the need for male shelters and services, but has been silenced at every opportunity. [1] Richard Gelles, a leading sociologist in domestic violence research, has also written extensively on the political activism which has attempted to undermine the credibility of domestic violence against men. [2]

Q: But aren't women injured more than men?

A: Yes and no. When it comes to physical abuse, men are on average larger and stronger than women. However, women can easily make up for this inequity by using weapons, anything from kitchen knives to a

frying pan. And according to the statistics, they do. [3] Women also don't only attack in self defense. A great deal of research has repeatedly confirmed that women are as likely to initiate a violent fight with their partner as men.

The physical abuse of children by mothers is yet another example where women have a physical advantage over their victims, and is a rarely-acknowledged aspect of domestic violence.

Also, domestic violence isn't just about hitting. A violent relationship is also when one person controls the other's self-esteem through manipulation, threats, and coercive actions. Many men are quite vulnerable to emotional manipulation by women, and some men have been emotionally destroyed over the years through verbal abuse from their partner. The scars from emotional battering are often just as painful as those from physical abuse, if not more so.

Q: Why don't men leave violent relationships?

A: Often, for the very same reasons that women don't leave violent partners. Men can have as much psychological dependency in a relationship as women, and still care about and want to support their partner. Men don't typically have the kind of emotional support network with their friends the way many women do, so this dependency can be very strong.

Also, married men with children know that in divorce court, it is very difficult for fathers to gain full custody of their children. Often, abusive wives are abusive mothers, and many fathers choose to endure abuse, sacrificing their own physical safety and sanity, rather than leave the children they love unprotected and at the mercy of a violent mother.

Q: So what's the solution?

A: The solution must first begin with the acknowledgment of battered men and a willingness to listen to their pain. Talk to your friends and family about the problem – you may be surprised at the number of men who have dealt with abuse, even those who never acknowledged it this way themselves.

Shelters and hotlines which serve men are also a much needed resource. Many men have nowhere to turn for help, and this needs to change. There are only a handful of shelters and phone lines which were created to serve abused men, compared to hundreds across the country for women.

Q: What should I do if I know a man who is being abused?

A: First, be willing to listen and provide support for this person – remember, he probably doesn't have anyone else to turn to. Contact a local domestic violence shelter and ask if they know of any shelters or resources for men. Also see the section on *Advocacy and Services* below.

Q: Where can I find more information about domestic violence against men?

A: There are many informational resources on the internet about abused men, including the following:

Research

Domestic Violence Research at UNH:

www.unh.edu/frl

The work of Dr. Murray Straus, a UNH Sociology professor for over 30 years and founder and co-director of the UNH Family Research Lab, has been instrumental in raising awareness of the domestic abuse of men. His groundbreaking work in domestic violence has been replicated and confirmed by more than a hundred other studies, which all found that *men and women are assaulted by their partner at about equal rates.*

The Fiebert Bibliography:

www.csulb.edu/~mfiebert/assault.htm

This 20–page bibliography examines more than 100 studies which demonstrate that women are as physically aggressive, or more aggressive, than men in their relationships with their spouses or male partners.

Mensactivism.org Research Flyer:

www.mensactivism.org/dv_flyers.shtml

Please see our research flyers for more information about domestic violence research.

Advocacy and Services

The Battered Men's Helpline

www.noexcuse4abuse.org

As one of the few resources in the country that was created to serve abused men, the **Battered Men's Helpline** is a non–profit organization which supports battered men with a toll–free hotline. Their number is **1–877–643–1120, access code 0757**. They are based in the Portland, Maine area but have assisted men all over the country.

SAFE: Stop Abuse For Everyone

www.safe4all.org

SAFE is a non–profit organization advocating for underrepresented domestic violence populations, including straight and gay men. The website has an international list of local resources, an online support group, references to research, news, essays, and offers training programs on how to provide services for these populations.

Domestic Violence Against Men:

www.dvmen.org

This web site also has many essays and resources about domestic violence against men and services for battered men.

Gay Men's Domestic Violence Project:

www.gmdvp.org

While most of the information presented in this flyer has referred to heterosexual relationships, domestic violence can also occur against gay men. GMDVP offers shelter, guidance, and resources to allow gay, bisexual, and transgender men in crisis to remove themselves from violent situations and relationships. They are based in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

News and Media Reports

The Men's Activism News Network:

www.mensactivism.org

Tracks news stories on men's issues, including domestic violence against men. Encourages activism through awareness and letter writing campaigns.

The DesertLight Journal:

www.desertlightjournal.homestead.com

An e–mail newsletter edited by Trudy Schuett, which also tracks news on men's issues, focusing on domestic violence and father's issues.

Notes:

1: Erin Pizzey authored a book, Prone to Violence, in which she described the resistance to her efforts to create the first shelters for battered men and women in Britain. Pizzey received death threats from women's groups shortly after writing it for supporting shelters which serve battered men.

2. Gelles, Richard J. *Who's abusing whom?: Domestic violence and political correctness*, The Women's Quarterly, Fall 1999.

3. 1992 *National Alcohol and Family Violence Survey*, conducted by Dr. Glenda Kaufman–Kantor from the UNH Family Research Lab.