

Getting the Facts: Research About Domestic Violence Against Men

Q: How prevalent is domestic violence against men? What sources support this?

Research in the field of domestic violence over the past 25 years has generally shown that men and women act violent in relationships at about the same rate. Furthermore, men and women are equally likely to instigate violence against one another. The truth is surprisingly egalitarian: about half of all domestic violence occurs with both partners abusing each other. 25% occurs with only men assaulting women, and the other 25% occurs with only women assaulting men. [1]

The Fiebert Bibliography, described at the end of this flyer, lists over 100 studies which show that women are as likely, or more likely, to commit abuse in relationships as men. Dr. Murray Straus, a UNH Sociologist, founder and co-director of the Family Research Lab, is the author or co-author of several of these studies.

Q: But don't women only hit men in self defense?

Contrary to popular belief, women don't only hit in self-defense, which has been proven many times over in domestic violence research. Dr. Murray Straus himself was surprised to find that women hit first just as often as men do, and has confirmed this result many times to be certain. [2]

Q: But don't other studies contradict this information? What about Department of Justice Studies?

Older DoJ studies tended to find that women are the majority of victims of domestic violence. But as time has gone on, the number of abused men has gone up. In fact, in the most recent DoJ study on domestic violence, 1.5 million women and 835,000 men were found to have been battered. That means that 36% of domestic violence victims are men. On top of that,

men have always been underreported in crime surveys such as the DoJ studies.

Q: Why are men under-reported in crime studies about domestic violence?

Many crime studies are done by telephone, and when a man is told that he is responding to a "crime survey," he is less likely to report abuse than a woman. Both men and women tend to think of domestic abuse as a personal matter and not a crime, but with men this misperception is much stronger, especially since domestic violence campaigns have made women more aware of this problem as a crime.

Other crime surveys are derived from police arrest logs, and here bias against men exists strongly. Police are much more likely to arrest a man than a woman when fielding a domestic dispute call, and lobbying by women's groups and biased police training manuals (which always refer to the victim as "she" or "her" and the perpetrator as "he" or "him") contribute to the underreporting of men.

Q: I find it hard to believe that so many popular domestic violence statistics are false. Why would researchers lie about domestic violence?

It actually isn't so much that the researchers are "lying" about their information, but the sources and research methods that they have used are strongly biased against men.

The most fair studies on domestic violence don't rely on crime surveys or police statistics, but rather on surveys which ask about *specific abusive events*. When men and women are asked direct questions about whether certain acts of violence have occurred, the results give a clearer picture of family violence than whether certain acts are a "crime" or if they resulted in an arrest.

Some misinformation, however, is the result of an overzealous media which has done a poor job at verifying their news stories.

For example, during the 1993 Super Bowl, it was announced throughout the country that battered women's shelters reported a sharp increase in calls during Super Bowl Sunday. Sources from *The Boston Globe* to CBS News reported this fact, which was found to be entirely false. [3] In another case, several major newspapers reported that according to a March of Dimes study, domestic violence was the leading cause of birth defects. Once again, it was found that

this study never existed. [4]

Perhaps you've even heard of these "facts" and repeated them without knowing that they were false. The extent to which misinformation about domestic violence exists in our society is often disturbing and this misinformation needs to be challenged.

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

The following books are readable, secondary sources which deal with the subject of battered men:

Abused Men: The Hidden Side of Domestic Violence, by Philip Cook

Women Can't Hear What Men Don't Say, by Warren Farrell

When She Was Bad: Violent Women and the Myth of Innocence, by Patricia Pearson

Behind Closed Doors, by Murray Straus, Richard Gelles, and Suzanne Steinmetz is also a readable overview of domestic violence research written by some important researchers in the field.

Violent Touch: Breaking Through the Stereotype, by David Fontes. Published on-line by SAFE (Stop Abuse for Everyone) at: www.safe4all.org/essays/vtbreak.pdf

If you're interested in looking at primary sources of information, please pick up the Fiebert research bibliography packet. You can also find it on the web at the following URL:

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

SUMMARY: This bibliography examines 122 scholarly investigations, 99 empirical studies and 23 reviews and/or analyses, which demonstrate that women are as physically aggressive, or more aggressive, than men in their relationships with their spouses or male partners. The aggregate sample size in the reviewed studies exceeds 77,000.

Conclusions:

There is a great deal of sound research which supports the existence of battered men and these men are in need of resources to help them. The question is how to inform the public and media about the gross

misconceptions people have about domestic violence, and we hope you will consider doing something this month to help stop the spread of misinformation about the serious social problem of domestic violence.

Domestic violence is *not* a gender issue.

Notes:

1: Interview with Prof. Murray Straus of the UNH Family Research Lab. www.vortexweb.net/gorgias/mens_issues/straus_interview.html

2: Ibid

3: Christina Hoff-Sommers, Who Stole Feminism?

4: Ibid.