

## **Plight of male victims of domestic abuse**

Experiences reported to the Dewar Research Survey 2001<sup>(1)</sup> by 100 male victims of domestic violence in England and Wales and in Ireland suggested that genuine male victims of female violence in couple relationships suffered no less physical and emotional consequences than female victims in many instances. Over half had been threatened with a weapon and a significant proportion reported serious forms of injury. One third had been kicked in the genitals, and others burnt or scalded, stabbed, or hit with heavy objects. Male victims were also less likely than female victims to report the violence or abuse against them, and when they did report, were often faced with what appeared to be widespread prejudice or discrimination against them by the police, social agencies and courts. About one fifth of male victims were themselves arrested. Little action was taken by the police against female assailants unless the men had a visible and significant injury.

Nearly half of male victims who reported abuse against them were subsequently excluded from the family home, and a significant proportion lost meaningful or any contact with their children, who usually remained with the violent mother. Father victims who reported abuse against them by the mother were particularly vulnerable to the consequences of parental separation and the continuing hostility and obstruction of the mother. Only a small proportion of father victims subsequently had regular unimpeded contact with their children. Over three quarters of the 203 children involved witnessed the violence by the mother against the father.

Zero tolerance and pro-arrest policies appeared to be directed mainly at men and offered little protection to genuine male victims and their children. The responses to the Survey suggested that in a substantial number of emergency attendances, the police did not act either impartially or fairly. A male victim appeared to be over twice as likely as a female assailant of being arrested when the police responded to an emergency call. There appeared a marked reluctance on the part of the police to arrest a violent female partner in a domestic incident. Few violent female partners were arrested, fewer still charged, and fewer still ever convicted.

Bias against male victims appeared to extend to the courts. Male victims had limited success in obtaining non-molestation and exclusion orders against violent female partners. None of the male victims responding to the Survey who had applied for an exclusion order had been granted one, compared to a high success rate by female partners against them.

The results of the Dewar Research Survey followed a similar pattern to those of other surveys and academic studies, and were very similar to the results of the 1998 *Dispatches* survey which used virtually the same instrument and also reported on 100 male victims (see Dewar Research website for details [www.dewar4research.org](http://www.dewar4research.org)). Although there has been some change in attitude in England and Wales since 2001 with wider public recognition of the existence and plight of male victims, there appears to be still widespread bias against male victims on the part of the police and social agencies. There are still no accredited treatment programmes for female perpetrators, and few violent women are arrested or charged in domestic incidents. Public funding to support male victims and their children is still an exception, and only a handful of emergency refuge places are available for them.

A major problem facing the police seems to be that the system is just not set up to cater for female perpetrators. Female prisoners often are more difficult to deal with than male prisoners so police officers are more ready to arrest the man, especially if

the woman gets in an allegation first that she is the victim. Often also, the male victim does not make an allegation against the woman, even when it is clear that she is the perpetrator, but she does against him, so that he is the only one who can be lawfully arrested.

The latest published British Crime Survey results for year 2006/07 in England and Wales<sup>(2)</sup> show that male victims of partner abuse constitute about 40% of all victims, with a higher proportion (48%) in the category of 'severe force' during the previous 12 months.

Although the experiences of male and female victims have much in common, and both sexes can suffer physical and emotional harm, the plight of male victims is compounded by:

- A greater reluctance to report, even when injured or suffering chronic abuse
- More likelihood of them being disbelieved or even ridiculed if they do
- A greater likelihood of being themselves arrested
- A dearth of effective support services for them including emergency accommodation – they being often directed to bed and breakfasts or hostels unsuitable for fathers with children
- A greater likelihood of being themselves removed from the family home with a high risk of subsequent loss of meaningful, or any, contact with their children, and risk of an adverse effect on their career prospects
- A greater difficulty in obtaining court orders against violent partners
- The institutionalised effects of official policies and practice still negatively influenced against them by entrenched and hostile perspectives based on women as victims and men as perpetrators, so that a holistic and more equitable approach is ignored, and no government funding made available for male victims.

The recent Report<sup>(3)</sup> published by the Home Affairs Select Committee following its Inquiry into Domestic Violence in England and Wales largely ignored the plight of male victims, although it did recommend the provision of more emergency accommodation for them but subject to 'means-testing'.

#### *References*

- (1) **Male Domestic Violence Victims Survey 2001.** Malcolm J George and David J Yarwood. MAIN FINDINGS, October 2004. Dewar Research, Ascot
- (2) **Homicides, Firearm Offences and Intimate Violence 2006/07** (Supplementary Volume 2 to Crime in England and Wales 2006/07) Povey et al. Home Office Statistical Bulletin 03/08, 31 January 2008. Table 3.01
- (3) **Domestic Violence, Forced marriage and "Honour" – Based Violence.** Sixth Report of Session 2007-08, House of Commons Home Affairs Committee. HC263-1, 13 June 2008

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