

Men and Domestic Violence:
What Research Tells Us

by

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Preface

“Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I’ll meet you there”.
Rumi, Sufi poet (1207-1273)

This report was commissioned by the Department of Health and Children. As its title indicates, we were asked to find out what research studies tell us about domestic violence against men. In answering this question we have broadened the context to include women as well as men so that the experience of each can be seen in a comparative context.

Some may find this a challenging report essentially because it questions a long-standing consensus, both in Ireland and elsewhere, that women are the only victims, and men are the only perpetrators, of domestic violence. We are aware that there are no pure facts, either inside or outside research. Data on domestic violence, whether based on self-reports by victims or by perpetrators, by women or by men, need to be treated seriously and to be carefully examined to assess their validity and reliability. We have tried to do this in a balanced way in the report.

It is well known that women are vastly more likely than men to present as victims of domestic violence to services such as the accident and emergency departments of hospitals, to refuges for abused women, to treatment clinics, to police stations and to the law courts. This clearly indicates that domestic violence is a serious problem for women and probably more serious than the numbers using these services fully convey. However it is also well known that people who use services are rarely representative of the population in general whether with respect to domestic violence or indeed any other characteristic. In order to derive more reliable estimates of the prevalence of domestic violence it is necessary to have a sample of men and women which is known to be representative of the general population and to gain their confidential self-reported experiences of domestic violence both as victims and as perpetrators. Of course this procedure is not perfect either – since there is conclusive evidence that both men and women over-report their victimisation and under-report their perpetration and somewhat less conclusive evidence that men may do this more than women – but it is superior to any other method of estimating prevalence which has been tried or tested. It is these prevalence studies which form the core of this report.

If invited to summarise our findings in a few sentences we would say that representative gender-neutral studies of men and women in a number of English-speaking developed

countries, notably the US, the UK, Canada and New Zealand, indicate that domestic violence probably occurs in about 10% to 20% of all heterosexual relationships - with considerably higher prevalence rates for younger cohabiting couples - and tends to be severe in about a third of all cases. The results of these studies are fairly consistent in showing that, in approximately half of all intimate relationships where domestic violence occurs, both partners use violent acts, with the remainder divided equally between male-only violence and female-only violence. As a result, the self-reported prevalence of domestic violence among men and women, both as victims and as perpetrators, is broadly similar for all types of violence, both psychological and physical, minor and severe. In addition, both men and women are about equally likely to initiate domestic violence and seem to give broadly similar reasons for doing so. However it needs to be emphasised that the outcomes of domestic violence in terms of physical and psychological injuries tend to be considerably more negative for women victims than for men victims.

These findings indicate that the existing consensus on this issue does not fully reflect the reality of violence between men and women in intimate relationships. The converse of these findings also needs to be emphasised: the vast majority of men and women are not violent to each other in intimate relationships.

These findings challenge the existing consensus not by rejecting it but by incorporating it within a more complex vision of domestic violence as revealed in the studies reviewed here. In reality this simply means that the problem of domestic violence in English-speaking developed countries is larger in scope and complexity than originally envisaged; it in no way detracts from what we already know about the incidence, prevalence and correlates of domestic violence affecting women in either developed or developing countries. Of course this finding, like most research, raises as many questions as it answers since there has been so little research on certain aspects of domestic violence – notably male victims and female perpetrators - and almost none in Ireland. In addition, it raises a host of questions about why domestic violence is socially constructed to the point that male victims and female perpetrators are virtually invisible and this has major implications for society in general and public policy in particular.

Executive Summary

“Things have not only to be seen to be believed, but also have to be believed to be seen”.
Stan Gooch, scientist and author, 1990.

This study was commissioned to provide a broad overview of the most up-to-date research on domestic violence against men. It was written to answer five key questions about domestic violence against men. Here are our answers in summary form:

What is the Context for Reviewing Domestic Violence Against Men?

In the area of domestic violence, there is a tendency to assume that, in the vast majority of cases, men are its only perpetrators and women are its only victims. This consensus has recently been brought into question by the emerging visibility of male victims of domestic violence. The existing consensus on domestic violence is itself deeply rooted in our cultural images of men and women and these permeate the field of research, policy analysis and service provision.

What Research Exists On Prevalence of Domestic Violence Against Men?

There is an enormous literature on domestic violence although only a relatively small proportion of it is relevant to the question of determining the prevalence of domestic violence against either men or women. The only fundamental requirement in estimating the prevalence of domestic violence in a population – which in this review we have confined to men and women in a heterosexual relationship - is to have a randomised procedure for selecting a representative sample and an appropriate research instrument for measuring self-reported experiences of domestic violence. Using these criteria we selected nine surveys: four from the US, two from the UK, two from Canada and one from New Zealand. We do not claim that these are exhaustive, but they certainly are among the most important and frequently cited published studies up to the end of 1999.

What is the Prevalence of Domestic Violence Against Men?

The consensus emerging from the major studies of domestic violence reviewed here is that, in English-speaking developed countries such as the US, the UK, Canada and New Zealand, domestic violence probably occurs in about 10% to 20% of all heterosexual relationships - with considerably higher prevalence rates for younger cohabiting couples - and tends to be severe in about a third of all cases¹. These findings are based on self-reports of victimisation and perpetration by men and women – which is the only effective way of ascertaining the true prevalence of domestic violence – even though there is conclusive evidence that both men and women over-report their victimisation and under-report their perpetration and somewhat less conclusive evidence that men may do this more than women. Even when we take these considerations into account, the results of representative studies are fairly consistent in showing that, in approximately half of all intimate relationships where domestic violence occurs, both partners use violent acts, with the remainder divided equally between male-only violence and female-only violence. As a result, the self-reported prevalence of domestic violence among men and women, both as victims and as perpetrators, is broadly similar for all types of violence, both psychological² and physical³, minor and severe. However it needs to be emphasised that the outcomes of domestic violence in terms of physical and psychological injuries tend to be considerably more negative for female victims than for male victims. At the same time, it also needs to be emphasised that women are not the only victims and the existing consensus does not fully reflect the reality of violence between men and women in intimate

¹ Since completing our study, two further national surveys of domestic violence have been published. The first of these - the Canadian Social Survey on Victimisation, 1999 - was based on a random sample of 25,874 men and women and found that 2% of men and 2% of women had been victims of domestic violence in the last year which is lower than any of the prevalence rates recorded in the studies which we reviewed, possibly due to the methodology involved (Statistics Canada, 2000). Unfortunately this study does not allow us to estimate the breakdown of domestic violence between mutual violence, male-only violence and female only violence. The second study - the US National Violence Against Women Survey, 1995/6 - was based on a random sample of 16,000 men and women and found that 1.1% of women and 0.6% of men had been physically assaulted by an intimate partner in the last year which, in addition to showing a much higher rate of victimisation among women than among men, also shows a much lower prevalence rate than that recorded in the studies which we reviewed, again possibly due to the methodology involved (Tjaden, & Thoennes, 2000). Like the Canadian study, the US study does not allow us to estimate the breakdown of domestic violence between mutual violence, male-only violence and female only violence. Both studies serve as a useful reminder that measuring the prevalence and composition of domestic violence is highly sensitive to the methodologies involved.

² The term psychological violence covers acts such as insulting or swearing at a person, sulking or refusing to talk about an issue, stomping out of the room, saying or doing something out of spite, threatening, throwing or smashing something.

³ Minor physical violence refers to acts such as throwing something at a person, pushing, grabbing, shoving or slapping a person. Severe physical violence refers to acts such as kicking, biting, hitting or beating a person as well as using or threatening to use a knife or gun.

relationships. The converse of these findings also needs to be emphasised: the vast majority of men and women are not violent to each other in intimate relationships.

These findings are difficult to reconcile with the fact that women are more likely than men to present as victims of domestic violence to the accident and emergency departments of hospitals, to refuges for abused women, to police stations, to treatment clinics and to seek legal remedies. In trying to address the tension between these two findings it is important not to dismiss either of them as insignificant. In order to build a bridge of understanding between the two results, it is important to bear four factors in mind: (1) the most deviant forms of domestic violence – whether of men against women or vice versa – may not be included in representative surveys of the type reviewed here; (2) men inflict more injuries on women than vice versa and this would account for the greater proportion of women victims in services; (3) male victims of domestic violence may face much greater barriers in accessing services than female victims; and (4) there is a much greater range of services for female victims of domestic violence than for male victims. These considerations are not designed to provide an exhaustive explanation of why the results of statistically reliable surveys of domestic violence are so at variance with the results of samples of service users. However they do suggest that neither of these findings can be ignored and that domestic violence can no longer be treated as an exclusively women's issue; it is an issue which affects men as well as women, both as victims and perpetrators.

What Are The Factors Associated With Domestic Violence?

It is evident from the literature that power is a common theme in all forms of domestic violence. Relationships in which one partner is dominant – sometimes the man, sometimes the woman – are at higher risk of domestic violence than more democratic, egalitarian relationships. Victims of domestic violence invariably experience powerlessness but perpetrators can also act out of a similar sense of powerlessness. Power can have a personality dimension but it almost invariably has an economic dimension and male and female victims are usually in a weak economic position within the relationship. Power also has a physical dimension in that people with a physical disability are more vulnerable than those without; elderly people can also be at risk of abuse. The extent of powerlessness experienced through domestic violence can be seen in the fact that female victims typically feel that there is nothing they can do to stop it while male victims often blame themselves for the violence inflicted upon them. Both men and women can be trapped in a violent relationship but men seem more

unwilling than women to leave violent relationships, although women place themselves at higher risk of domestic violence by trying to do so. Abusive family backgrounds are also a contributory factor in the perpetration of domestic violence. Domestic violence is associated with lower socio-economic status but of course it can be found in all social classes and is confined to a minority within every social class. These findings suggest that no one theory or paradigm can properly explain domestic violence. However there is sufficient evidence to suggest that domestic violence is essentially a learned behaviour and therein lies the hope that what is learned can be unlearned.

What Services Are Needed to Address Domestic Violence Against Men?

There are virtually no services for male victims of domestic violence even in countries where there is statistical evidence to indicate that domestic violence against men is a substantial reality. The reason for this is not just the existing consensus about domestic violence – and the resistance which this creates to the idea that men could be victimised by women – but the reluctance of male victims themselves to present for services. The reality of domestic violence for men as well as women is that it is a private, hidden and often shameful form of suffering that few ever hear about other than the men, women and children who are immediately involved. The stigma of being in a violent relationship, and the fear of even more negative consequences if others know about it, lead victims and perpetrators to conspire in keeping secret the violence in their relationship so that women as well as men are reluctant to present for services until their situation becomes intolerable. However there is considerable evidence that men are even more reluctant than women to report their own victimisation to the police or medical authorities and those that do often have negative experiences from these services and the professionals involved. Even if we allow for the fact that men in general seem to suffer less negative outcomes of domestic violence than women, particularly in terms of physical injuries, these differences are scarcely sufficient to account for the major disparity between the number of men and women who present for services, given what we know about the prevalence of domestic violence between men and women.

It is well recognised that one of the ways of addressing the problem of domestic violence against women is to raise public awareness. However a major difficulty facing the male victims of domestic violence is that public awareness and professional perceptions are often very heavily influenced by the existing consensus on this issue; this can exacerbate the problems of male victims because it effectively denies the reality of their experience and

contributes to the mutually reinforcing process that men do not present for services while services, in turn, do not develop to respond to men's needs.

Help lines, support groups and counselling have a role in supporting male victims as they do for female victims. However these services are typically under-funded and sometimes run by untrained volunteers. Also, there seems to be no good reason why information about male and female help lines could not be published on the same leaflets and disseminated widely through health centres, Garda stations, doctor's surgeries, etc.

In Ireland as elsewhere there is a perception that, in matters of family law, it is harder for men than women to get justice in the family courts. Whether or not this is true, it is still difficult to explain why there have been virtually no cases in Ireland taken by male victims against their female perpetrators in view of the fact that the letter of Irish law on domestic violence is gender neutral and the fact that the prevalence of domestic violence against men is probably similar in Ireland to that which we have found in other English-speaking developed countries. There seems to be a good deal of dissatisfaction with the way in which the legal system handles the issue of domestic violence, particularly by men but also by women, and it is probably no exaggeration to say that, in some cases at least, the trauma of domestic violence may be exacerbated rather than ameliorated by the legal system as it presently operates.

What is the Way Forward from Here?

The findings in this report point to the need for a larger and more inclusive paradigm of domestic violence than is currently allowable within the existing consensus. By the same reasoning, these findings also make it extremely difficult to sustain credibly a perspective on domestic violence which assumes that, in the vast majority of cases, men are its only perpetrators and women its only victims. The broader and more inclusive paradigm of domestic violence which is suggested by the findings of this report in no way diminish what we already know about the suffering caused to women at the hands of men; nor should it be used in any way as an excuse to reduce services for women victims of domestic violence. A more inclusive approach to domestic violence should not create competition between victims by minimising the experiences of men at the expense of women or vice versa. Although we have no firm evidence on the true prevalence of domestic violence in Ireland, at least not with respect to male victims and female perpetrators, it seems unlikely that it should be significantly different to other English-speaking developed countries such as the US, the UK, Canada or New Zealand. For this reason, it would be reasonable to proceed on the assumption

that domestic violence against men is a significant problem and mutual violence is the main form in which domestic violence tends to occur. That is the basis for a more inclusive paradigm of domestic violence and the starting point for a more comprehensive approach to the development of services for the victims and perpetrators of domestic violence.

Chapter One

What is the Context for Reviewing Domestic Violence Against Men?

“When paradigms change, the world itself changes with them. Led by a new paradigm, scientists ... see new and different things when looking with familiar instruments in places they have looked before. It is rather as if the professional community has been suddenly transported to another planet where familiar objects are seen in a different light and are joined by unfamiliar ones as well” Thomas S. Kuhn, 1970:111.

1.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the context which gave rise to this review of domestic violence against men. In broad outline, the context has two main features. First, there is the existing consensus which has shaped research and policy on domestic violence in Ireland and is based on the premise that, in the vast majority of cases, men are the only perpetrators and women are the only victims of domestic violence. In section 1.2 we briefly review the documentation and assumptions which support this position. Second, there is the emergence of AMEN whose work has highlighted the reality of domestic violence against men in Ireland. In section 1.3 we briefly review its contribution to raising questions about the nature of domestic violence and casting some doubt on the existing consensus. This context prompted the need for the present study whose terms of reference are summarised in section 1.4. Finally we make a few concluding remarks in section 1.5.

1.2 The Existing Consensus

The existing consensus on domestic violence - that women are its only victims and men its only perpetrators – has deep-seated roots in our culture where there seems to be a widespread assumption that “no man would ever allow himself to be abused by a women” and conversely, “no woman would ever perpetrate abuse on a man”. Although a number of studies indicate that physical aggression by men against women is generally seen as socially unacceptable – and is less likely to occur where attitudes do not support it¹ - physical aggression by men is nevertheless seen much more negatively than physical aggression by women². One US study found that “battered husbands” were viewed much less sympathetically than “battered wives”,

¹ O’Leary, 1993:24; Dibble & Straus, 1980.

² See for example Arias & Johnson, 1989; Riggs, Murphy & O’Leary, 1989.

while heterosexual battered males were rated more negatively than homosexual battered males³. In Britain, some research has documented a perception among social workers, police and women's refuge workers that domestic violence against men does not exist to any great extent and, where it does, it is assumed that women perpetrators must have had a good reason for being violent⁴. In Australia, research on domestic violence has found that both men and women were significantly more negative in their evaluation of the husband than the wife, were more sympathetic to the wife and believed that the husband deserved a harsher penalty for his violence⁵. In Ireland, a small scale study found that the majority of respondents believed that women were the principal victims of domestic violence and that women assaulting men is not nearly as serious as men assaulting women⁶. It is perhaps worth noting in this context that men are the main victims of violent crime generally⁷.

Beyond this cultural context, the existing consensus about domestic violence seems to be supported by three additional assumptions, particularly in Ireland. The first assumption is that this consensus is unambiguously supported by international research. For example, one Irish review of the evidence states that "in the vast majority of cases where violence occurs, men are the perpetrators and women the victims (Byles, 1978; Dobash and Dobash, 1979; 1992; Martin, 1976; Watkins, 1982; Kelly, 1999)"⁸. Some of the references cited here are quite old; none refer to the major gender-neutral surveys of domestic violence which are reviewed in Chapters Two and Three below and which show that the evidence does not in fact support the existing consensus. Another Irish review also reached the conclusion that "study after study has documented the persistent, systematic, severe and intimidating force which men inflict on women (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Martin, 1976; Pagelow, 1981)"⁹. This conclusion is valid as far as it goes but the prevalence of men's violence against women cannot be used to make generalised inferences about domestic violence as a whole; "study after study" has often tended to focus exclusively on women's victimisation and men's perpetration without including the reverse side of this coin – women's perpetration and men's victimisation¹⁰. This leads us to reflect on the second assumption in the existing consensus.

³ Harris & Cooke, 1994.

⁴ Stitt & Macklin, 1995.

⁵ See Feather, 1996: cited by Fiebert, 1998.

⁶ Anderson, 1999.

⁷ Mirlees-Black, Budd, Partridge and Mayhew, 1998:7; Watson, 2000:13

⁸ Kelleher & O'Connor, 1999:1.

⁹ Kelleher & O'Connor, 1995:2.

¹⁰ See for example Statistics Canada, 1993; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996; New Zealand Ministry of Justice, 1996; Romkens, 1997; Kelleher & O'Connor, 1995.

The second assumption is that research on the prevalence of domestic violence against women can be used to make claims about the prevalence of domestic violence generally. This is clearly erroneous. A substantial amount of research on domestic violence is based on studies of women only and, although extremely valuable in themselves, these studies do not reflect the whole picture with regard to prevalence of domestic violence in society. The only major national survey of domestic violence in Ireland¹¹ was based on a random sample of approximately 1,500 women over the age of 18 years which was carried out in 1994. This postal survey achieved a response rate of 46% which, though possibly adequate, is considerably lower than the lowest response rate (64%) in any of the national random surveys reviewed in Chapters Two and Three below. The results of this survey showed that the prevalence of domestic violence against women was around 18% which is not hugely dissimilar to the prevalence reported in two British surveys carried out in 1994 and 1996 and reviewed in Chapters Two and Three. The earlier of these studies¹² found that 13.4% of women had been physically victimised in one or more of their intimate relationships but the same study also found that 17.3% of men had also been physically victimised; the other study¹³ found that 22.7% of women had experienced some sort of physical violence in intimate relationships over their lifetime but the same study found that 14.9% of the men had been victimised in intimate relationships over their lifetime. Thus when gender-neutral research is carried out on domestic violence it tends to confirm the prevalence rates found in ‘women only’ studies but also finds, depending on the study, similarly high levels of domestic violence against men. In Ireland we know virtually nothing about the prevalence of domestic violence against men in intimate relationships because the question has never been asked.

The third assumption is that valid claims about the prevalence of domestic violence can be gleaned from research based on services used by the victims of domestic violence such as police records, refuges, etc. Again, this research can be useful in terms of clarifying key aspects of domestic violence but it is not a valid basis for estimating prevalence. Nevertheless the most frequently cited authority in Ireland on the prevalence of domestic violence¹⁴ is based on the analysis of police records of domestic violence in Scotland¹⁵. This study has also been replicated in Ireland through analysis of Garda records in order “to generate baseline quantitative and qualitative data on the way domestic violence cases are processed in the Irish

¹¹ Kelleher & O'Connor, 1995.

¹² Carrado, George, Loxam, Jones & Templar, 1996.

¹³ Mirrlees-Black, 1999.

¹⁴ Dobash & Dobash, 1979.

¹⁵ Cited in Kelleher & O'Connor, 1995; 1999; Task Force on Violence Against Women, 1997.

civil and criminal justice systems”¹⁶. Some of the findings of this research were based on call-outs by the Garda Síochána to domestic violence incidents¹⁷. In one sub-area of a Dublin Garda Division with a population of 100,000, it was found that 90% of the accused were male¹⁸. The results from two other research sites (a rural Garda Division with a population of approximately 100,000 and a Garda Division with two major towns with a population of 200,000), it was found that 97% of the accused were men. Similarly, when 379 cases from the Garda Criminal Records Office files on domestic violence were analysed, it was found that 99% of the offenders were men. These results are in line with international evidence which uses this type of data but they beg the question as to whether police records accurately reflect the underlying reality of domestic violence. The 1996 British Crime Survey on domestic violence¹⁹ threw some light on this question when it pointed out that only 17% of the victims of domestic violence had informed the police. However it is the findings on the differences between men and women that is particularly relevant in this context: “Only 7% of chronic and intermittent male victims said the police had been alerted, compared to 16% of intermittent female victims, and 36% of chronic female victims”²⁰. This report also found that as many men as women were victimised by their intimate partners in the past year although women were more intensively victimised. These findings suggest that neither women nor men are keen to report their victimisation to the police, but men are far less keen than women. From the perspective of prevalence they confirm that police statistics do not reflect the true reality of domestic violence as experienced by either women or men, but especially by men²¹. This needs to be borne in mind when reading the 1998 Annual Report of the Garda Síochána which shows that, in the case of domestic violence, “complainants were predominantly female and 11% were male”²².

The consequences of the existing consensus on domestic violence in Ireland are to be found throughout public policy and are reflected most fully in the work of a Task Force on Violence Against Women set up in October 1996. Indeed this Task Force took the findings of the Irish survey cited above²³ as a key benchmark in its work, claiming that “the findings of this research are very much in line with international trends”²⁴. Similar assumptions are made in a

¹⁶ Kelleher & O'Connor, 1999.

¹⁷ *ibid*:4.

¹⁸ *ibid*:5.

¹⁹ Mirrlees-Black, 1999.

²⁰ *ibid*:54.

²¹ See also Buzawa, Austin, 1993; Henman, 1996.

²² Garda Síochána, 1998:106.

²³ Kelleher & O'Connor, 1995.

²⁴ Task Force on Violence Against Women, 1997:28.

programme for secondary school boys entitled *Exploring Masculinities*²⁵. Irish law on domestic violence is gender neutral but it is remarkable that much of the publicity material on domestic violence which has been disseminated by agencies such as the Garda Síochána and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions has tended to treat domestic violence as synonymous with violence against women. Similarly in the field of academic research and commentary, the existing consensus has resulted in domestic violence being used interchangeably with violence against women²⁶. Outside of Ireland there is a similar tendency to treat domestic violence as synonymous with violence against women²⁷. In some studies, this definition leads logically, if somewhat dangerously, to the inclusion of girls and the exclusion of boys, from the paradigm of domestic violence²⁸.

It is appropriate to ask in this context why the phenomenon of domestic violence has been so formulated as to virtually exclude the possibility of male victims or female perpetrators or indeed the more complex reality of mutual abuse despite the emergence of data which, as we shall see in Chapters Two, Three and Four, point to these realities. There is no easy answer to this question. One of the first researchers to carry out gender-neutral research on violence in American families, Suzanne Steinmetz, also reflected on the broader question of why so much attention is given to domestic violence against women and so little to domestic violence against men. She suggested the following explanation: “the relative lack of empirical data on the topic, the selective inattention both by the media and researchers, the greater severity of physical damage to women making their victimisation more visible, and the reluctance of men to acknowledge abuse at the hands of women”²⁹. This explanation, which is consistent with the findings of gender-neutral research on domestic violence, also helps to throw light on why domestic violence can be such a divisive issue – as much in Ireland as elsewhere – to such an extent that even raising the issue of domestic violence against men can be perceived as minimising the reality of domestic violence against women. Such a view was explicitly articulated by an American sociologist, Clifton Flynn who wrote that “drawing attention to battered husbands will impede attempts to battle the more serious problem of wife abuse”³⁰. Another American sociologist, Mildred Pagelow, adopted a similar stance: “the divisive question of male versus female victims hampered efforts to increase the funding and provision

²⁵ Department of Education and Science, 2000, p.252.

²⁶ See for example Kelly, 1996; O’Connor, 1996; McKiernan & McWilliams, 1997; Meade, 1997; Ferguson, 1997; O’Loughlin & Duggan, 1998; National Crime Forum, 1998; Community Workers Co-operative, 1999; Clare, 2000; Irish Commission for Justice and Peace, 2000.

²⁷ See for example UNICEF, 2000; European Women’s Lobby, 1999.

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ Steinmetz, 1977-78:504.

³⁰ Flynn, 1990:194.

of other resources to female victims of family violence³¹. Views such as these effectively perpetuate a divisive approach to domestic violence by discounting the possibility that men could ever be its victims, notwithstanding the findings of a number of gender-neutral studies. There can be few other areas of epidemiological research where studies on the prevalence of a source of harm - such as domestic violence - can be seen as divisive when that research is carried out on both genders.

1.3 AMEN

AMEN was founded in December 1997 and provides a confidential helpline as well as an information and support service for male victims of domestic abuse; in 2000 it established a refuge for male victims. In the three years since it was set up, AMEN has heard from over 6,000 men and concerned members of their families. These men come from all walks of life and range in age from seventeen to ninety.

In order to gain greater insight into the dimensions of domestic violence against men, AMEN commissioned a small survey of 40 men in the Monaghan area who volunteered to be interviewed on their experiences of victimisation by their women partners. The majority of these men (72%) had suffered some form of physical abuse and an even higher proportion (82%) had unsubstantiated allegations made against them, while all had suffered mental abuse such as threats to report the male victim as perpetrator. However only 45% contacted the Garda Síochána and, of those, 97% claimed that they had not been taken seriously or were treated as if they were the perpetrator. Seventy percent said they had found it difficult to leave their home because of concern for their children's safety.

AMEN has been active in raising the profile of domestic violence against men, particularly through holding two international conferences. The first of these conferences, entitled 'The Silence is Over', was held in Dublin on 10th December, 1998 and the second, entitled 'It is Also a Crime to Beat a Man', was held in Navan on 30th March, 2000. The speakers at these conferences included Erin Pizzey, founder of the first ever women's refuge in Chiswick, London in 1971; Dr. Malcolm George, a senior lecturer at London University, who has specialised in research on domestic violence; Marie Murray, clinical psychologist and author; Dr. Warren Farrell, an American author whose recent book³² contains an extensive review of

³¹ Pagelow, 1985:172.

³² Farrell, 1999.

the literature on domestic violence; three barristers practising in Ireland, and two members of Dáil Éireann, Roisín Shortall TD and Jim Higgins TD.

The AMEN conference in Navan in 2000 was opened by the Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Mary Wallace TD. The tone and content of her speech signalled an end to the divisiveness that, as discussed in the previous section, has been such a debilitating feature of the discourse on domestic violence. She stated: “I appreciate that there can be particular difficulties for men in reporting incidents of domestic violence and in the way that elements of society deals with such reports. ... There should be no competition between organisations working to support victims. I would put it to you that arguments between organisations representing victims are, in fact, counterproductive and do not serve victims in any way. They may, in fact, be assisting in the perpetration of such violence by dissuading victims from coming forward and seeking help”³³.

1.4 Terms of Reference for Study

The terms of reference for this study are summarised in Box 1.

Box 1 Terms of Reference for Review of Domestic Violence Against Men

The review will address the following questions:

1. What work has been carried out in relation to prevalence of domestic violence against men and what are the findings?
2. What paradigms are used to understand the phenomenon?
3. What measures have been useful?
4. What service needs have men who have been victims of violence identified?
5. What services have been developed in other countries and what trends are known in relation to their effectiveness?

In addressing these terms of reference we devote a separate chapter to each of the key questions as follows:

Chapter One: What is the context for reviewing domestic violence against men?

Chapter Two: What research exists on prevalence of domestic violence against men?

Chapter Three: What is the prevalence of domestic violence against men?

Chapter Four: What are the factors associated with domestic violence against men?

Chapter Five: What services are needed to address domestic violence against men?

Within the resources available to this study, it has not been possible - nor even necessary - to review every study which has ever been undertaken on domestic violence, essentially because only a relatively small number of these studies throw any light on the prevalence of domestic

violence against men. However we have focussed on those studies which are the most important, the most cited, and the most appropriate in terms of answering the questions which we have been posed in our terms of reference.

1.5 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the existing consensus about domestic violence in Ireland – as elsewhere – is that, in the vast majority of cases, men are its only perpetrators and women are its only victims. This view has deep cultural roots in our understanding of men and women and has shaped the way in which we think about domestic violence which, in turn, has permeated the field of research, policy analysis and service provision. In Ireland, this consensus has been supported by three core assumptions which, as we have seen, are open to serious question. These three assumptions are: (1) that the consensus is unambiguously supported by international research; (2) that research on the prevalence of domestic violence against women can be used to make claims about the prevalence of domestic violence generally; and (3) that valid claims about the prevalence of domestic violence can be gleaned from research based on services used by the victims of domestic violence such as police records, refuges, etc.

In recent years, largely as a result of the work of AMEN and the holding of two international conferences in Ireland on domestic violence against men in 1998 and 2000, there has been some questioning of this consensus which in turn has prompted the review of research documented in this report. Despite the extensive literature on domestic violence, the amount of research on the specific issue of its prevalence - particularly against men - is quite limited. In the main we have confined ourselves to this literature not only because it is the most relevant but also because it meets all the normal standards of good scientific research. With that in mind, we now address the first major question of the report: What research exists on the prevalence of domestic violence against men?

³³ Wallace, 2000.

Chapter Two

What Research Exists On Prevalence Of Domestic Violence Against Men?

“When resentment goads you to anger, remember that anger is a false imitation of fortitude, and fortitude is the antithesis of anger”.

Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536)

2.1 Introduction and Methodology

In this chapter we identify the research studies which are relevant to assessing the prevalence of domestic violence against men and women, either in the total population or in identified sub-populations of spouses, cohabitantes or dating couples. In line with conventional usage, we use the term ‘prevalence’ to refer to the percentage of the total population of men and women who are or have been victims or perpetrators of aggression within an intimate relationship. In our review we have confined ourselves to domestic violence in heterosexual relationships (with the exception of the British Crime Survey¹, which included data obtained from people in both heterosexual and homosexual relationships).

In adopting this definition of prevalence, we are obliged to exclude many studies of domestic violence which, despite throwing a good deal of light on various dimensions of domestic violence, do not clarify the fundamental question of its prevalence in the population. For example, as mentioned in the previous chapter, approximately 90% of those who contact the Garda Síochána about domestic violence are women². However, the population reporting to the Garda Síochána may well not be representative of the population at large. Likewise, those ‘battered’ women who seek shelter in refuges “experience a frequency of assault that is so much greater than that experienced by assaulted women in the general population that it is reasonable to assume a qualitatively different experience for these two groups of women”³. Crime surveys, while using random samples of the total population, may not fulfil the criteria of this investigation either, since questionnaires are usually based on whether or not a criminal offence has been committed. Technically speaking, all physical violence is a crime. However it has been suggested that respondents to crime surveys may presume that domestic violence by an intimate partner is not a crime and therefore under-report it. In order to

¹ Mirless-Black, 1999.

² Garda Síochána, 1998; 1999.

³ Straus, 1990d.

overcome these difficulties, the recent British Crime Survey⁴ had a separate component which took this form of under-reporting into consideration.

The only fundamental requirement in estimating the prevalence of domestic violence in the population is to have a randomised procedure for selecting a representative sample of the population. Using this criteria we have selected nine surveys which are based on randomly selected samples of the population. Four of these are American, two British, two Canadian and one New Zealand. We do not claim that this is exhaustive, but certainly these are amongst the most important, frequently cited and accessible studies⁵.

The terms of reference for the study, which required us to review research on the prevalence of domestic violence against men, necessitated the exclusion of a vast amount of research which is based on clinical, service-using or other self-selecting samples simply because they do not permit any conclusions to be drawn about the overall prevalence of domestic violence in the population, either against men or women⁶. Similarly we have excluded up to 100 studies which – although they have produced similar results to those which we analyse in detail in this and the next chapter – are based on either relatively small samples or on specific sub-populations such as dating couples on college campuses⁷. In Chapter Four we will draw some of the findings from these different studies to throw light on the correlates of domestic violence.

In describing the work that has been carried out, we have classified these studies under the following headings: sample size and response rate; sample characteristics; measurement

⁴ Mirless-Black, 1999.

⁵ Since completing our study, two further national surveys of domestic violence have been published. The first of these - the Canadian Social Survey on Victimization, 1999 - was based on a random sample of 25,874 men and women and found that 2% of men and 2% of women had been victims of domestic violence in the last year which is lower than any of the prevalence rates recorded in the studies which we reviewed, possibly due to the methodology involved (Statistics Canada, 2000). The second study - the US National Violence Against Women Survey, 1995/6 - was based on a random sample of 16,000 men and women and found that 1.1% of women and 0.6% of men had been physically assaulted by an intimate partner in the last year which, in addition to showing a much higher rate of victimisation among women than among men, also shows a much lower prevalence rate than that recorded in the studies which we reviewed, again possibly due to the methodology involved (Tjaden, & Thoennes, 2000). Both studies serve as a useful reminder that measuring the prevalence and composition of domestic violence is highly sensitive to the methodologies involved.

⁶ Examples of such studies include: Brutz & Ingoldsby, 1984; Cascardi, Langhinrichsen & Vivian, 1992; Kim & Cho, 1992; Merrill, Hervig, Milner, Newell & Koss, 1996; Nisonoff & Bitman, 1979; Nazroo, 1995, O'Leary, Barling, Arias, Rosenbaum, Malone & Tyree, 1989; Roberts, O'Toole, Raphael, Lawrence & Ashby, 1996; Rollins & Oheneba-Sakyi, 1990; and Russell & Hulson, 1992.

⁷ See for example, Farrell, 1999; Fiebert, 1999 for a comprehensive listing of studies on domestic violence.

instrument used; method of data collection; research design; unit and method of analysis. A profile of the studies under these headings is summarised in Table 2.1 and Table 2.2.

Table 2.1 Methodology of Surveys of Representative Samples of Men and Women

Data Source Country & Year	Authors Year	Sample Population	Achieved Sample Size	Res- ponse Rate	Sample Composition	
					Female	Male
1. US National Family Violence Survey, 1975/76	Straus , Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980.	Cohabiting & Married Adults Aged 18-65	2,143	64%	55%	45%
2.1 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Straus & Gelles 1986/1990	Cohabiting, married, recently separated, divorced or single parents Aged 18+	6,002	84%	59%	41%
2.2 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Stets & Straus, 1990a	Currently coupled	n=5,248		56%	44%
2.3 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Straus, 1993	Women respondents	n=2,994			
2.4 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Stets & Straus, 1989/1990b	Cohabiting	n=237			
2.5 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Stets & Straus, 1989/1990b	Married	n=5,005			
3. US National Survey of Families & Households, 1987-88	Brush, 1990	Aged 19+ Married couples	13,017 n=5,474			
4.1 US National Youth Survey, 1983	Morse, 1995	Aged 18-24	1,496 n=477*	87%	63%	37%
4.2 US National Youth Survey, 1986	Morse, 1995	Aged 21-27	1,384 n=723*	80%	56%	44%
4.3 US National Youth Survey, 1989	Morse, 1995	Aged 24-30	1,436 n=959*	83%	53%	47%
4.4 US National Youth Survey, 1992	Morse, 1995	Aged 27-33	1,340 n=1,001*	78%	51%	49%
5. British MORI Survey, 1994	Carrado et al., 1996	Aged 15+ Past/current partners	1,978 n=1,865		52%	48%
		Currently coupled	n=1,481		52%	48%
6. British Crime Survey, 1996	Mirrlees-Black, 1999	Aged 16-59	10,844	97%	54%	46%
7.1 Canada, Calgary Survey, 1981	Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1988	Cohabiting & Married couples	1,124	72%	50%	50%
8. Canada, Edmonton Survey, 1983/84	Bland & Orn, 1986	Aged 18+	1,200	80%	59%	41%
		Currently coupled	n=726		38%	62%
9. New Zealand, Dunedin Survey, 1972/73	Magdol, et al., 1997	Birth cohort	1,037	91%	48%	52%
		Aged 21 Currently coupled	n=861	83%	49%	51%

*These refer to sub-samples of respondents who are married or cohabiting.

Table 2.2 Methodology of Surveys of Representative Samples of Men and Women

Data Source	Measurement Instrument	Method of Data Collection and Analysis			
		Individuals			Couples Perpetrators
		Victims	Perpetrators	Victims & Perpetrators	
1. US National Family Violence Survey, 1975/76	CTS (N) (Straus, 1979)			Face to face interviews	
2.1 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	CTS (R*) (Straus, 1979 & 1981)			Telephone Interviews	
2.2 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985					
2.3 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985					
2.4 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985					
2.5 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985					
3. US National Survey of Families & Households, 1987-88	Derived from the CTS (N) Straus, 1979 (Brush, 1990)			Self-completion questionnaire	
4.1 US National Youth Survey, 1983	CTS (N) (Straus, 1979 & Straus, 1990c)			Face to face interviews	
4.2 US National Youth Survey, 1986					
4.3 US National Youth Survey, 1989					
4.4 US National Youth Survey, 1992					
5. British MORI Survey, 1994	Derived from CTS (N) (Straus, 1979)			Self-completion questionnaire	
6. British Crime Survey, 1996	BCS measure	Computer Assisted Self-Interviewing			
7. 1 Canada, Calgary Survey, 1981	CTS (N) (Straus, 1979) and various				Self-completion questionnaire
8. Canada, Edmonton Survey, 1983/84	Diagnostic Interview Schedule (DIS)		Structural Interviews with questionnaire		
9. New Zealand, Dunedin Survey, 1972/73	CTS (R*) (Straus, 1990b; & Hornung et al., 1981)	Face to Face Interviews	Face to Face Interviews		

2.2 Sample Size, Response Rate and Sample Frames

The significance of the sample size is that it must be representative of the total population unless it is a census of the total population. In general, the larger the sample, the greater the probability that accurate statistics will be obtained. This is particularly the case with sub-samples such as cohabiting couples which, although they make up a relatively small percentage of the total population, are more likely to be included in larger samples.

There is a general presumption within social survey research that a sample of 2,500 persons has broadly the same reliability and representativeness, whether it comes from a population of 100,000 persons or one million persons⁸. However, of the few random surveys that have been carried out to estimate prevalence of domestic violence, only three have reached this target, the American National Family Violence Survey of 1985⁹, the British Crime Survey of 1996¹⁰ and the American National Survey of Families and Households 1987/88¹¹.

The ultimate response rate is extremely important to the validity of conclusions drawn from the data. The social researcher, Earl Babbie suggests that, as a rough guide, “50 percent is adequate for analysis and reporting. A response of 60 percent is good. And a response rate of 70 percent is very good”¹². However, surveys about domestic violence run the risk that a significant sub-group of men or women may be missed simply because those involved in domestic violence may refuse to participate in the survey for reasons of guilt or fear.

The choice of sampling frame can also influence the response rate; a sample frame is a “list or quasi-list of units composing a population from which a sample is selected. If the sample is to be representative of the population it is essential that the sampling frame include all (or nearly all) members of the population”¹³. Whether the sample frame is by telephone subscription list or list of households, there will be a proportion of the chosen sample who cannot be reached, even after repeated attempts. It has been suggested that this group may include a higher proportion of “dysfunctional families’ than those who respond to the survey, and it is reasonable to assume that, of those families, some or many may include victims and

⁸ See Oxford Dictionary of Sociology, 1998.

⁹ Straus & Gelles, 1986.

¹⁰ Mirrlees-Black, 1999.

¹¹ Brush, 1990.

¹² Babbie, 1998:22.

¹³ *ibid*:G6.

perpetrators of domestic violence. We now provide a more detailed account of the samples used in each country.

2.2.1 United States of America

Of four national surveys carried out in the United States of America, the National Family Violence Survey 1975/76¹⁴, had an achieved sample size of 2,143 and a response rate of only 64%, its sample frame being through “(stratified) area probability”¹⁵. The second National Family Violence Re-survey 1985¹⁶ had an achieved sample size of 6,002 with a response rate of 84%. Its sample frame was through random digit dialling. The third was the National Survey of Families & Households¹⁷, carried out between 1987 and 1988. It had a total sample of 13,017 primary respondents, but the analysis under consideration in this paper is 5,474 married respondents living with a spouse. There is no indication of the achieved sample size or response rate but the sample frame was a national, multistage, area probability survey of those living in households. Finally the National Youth Survey¹⁸ was a longitudinal cohort study (1983-1992) straddling the periods covered by the National Family Violence Re-Survey and the National Youth Survey, The maximum sample size was achieved in the first year of 1,496 with a response rate of 87%. Its sample frame was a probability sample of households, based on multistage, cluster sampling design.

2.2.2 Britain

The first British national survey¹⁹ was administered by MORI in 1994, and achieved a sample size of 1,865 respondents who were or had been in a heterosexual relationship. The sample frame was through “a regular commercial bimonthly survey ... seeking to determine consumer and social attitudes. The data obtained was weighted to reflect the known profile of the adult population of the United Kingdom as determined from the most recent national census data”²⁰. The British Crime Survey, carried out by the Home Office in 1996²¹, surveyed 16,000 people in England and Wales, the sub-sample covering domestic violence being 10,844 people, which had a response rate of 97%. The sample frame was the Small Users Post code Address File which is a listing of all postal delivery points in the country.

¹⁴ Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980.

¹⁵ *ibid*:24 & 252.

¹⁶ Straus & Gelles, 1986.

¹⁷ Brush, 1990.

¹⁸ Morse, 1995.

¹⁹ Carrado, George, Loxam, Jones & Templar, 1996:404.

²⁰ *ibid*:402.

²¹ Mirrlees-Black, 1999.

2.2.3 Canada

There have been several national surveys in Canada but these have only published results on women victims in order to estimate prevalence of 'wife-beating'²². As such they are not relevant to the task of establishing the prevalence of domestic violence by women as well as men. However there have been two community surveys, one in Calgary and the other in Edmonton. The Calgary Survey sampled cohabiting and married couples in 1981²³. The sample size reached was 562 couples which, according to the authors, is "fairly representative of the 133,135 Calgary husband-wife families (including common-law unions)"²⁴. With regard to the sample frame used, "a systematic random sample was drawn from a current special reverse telephone directory. Telephone directories may discriminate against the poor, those with unlisted or new numbers, and the recently mobile, but this up-to-date directory claimed to represent 97 percent of its Calgary residents"²⁵. The Edmonton Survey²⁶ achieved a sample size of 1,200 people and a response rate of 80%. Its sample frame was a computerised listing of all residential addresses in Edmonton.

2.2.4 New Zealand

A survey carried out in Dunedin, New Zealand²⁷ was based on a cohort of 21 year olds, reached a sample size of 941 and achieved a response rate of 91%. Its sample frame was a complete cohort of 1,140 births over 12 months during 1972 and 1973, 91% of which were included in the study, when contacted three years later. Although it is neither nationally representative nor comparable in age ranges to the other surveys included in this analysis, it broadens the international base somewhat.

2.3 Sample Characteristics

Sample characteristics typically refer to the characteristics of respondents such as their age, sex, socio-economic status, geographical location, marital status including whether single, dating, cohabiting, married, separated or widowed, etc. Random samples are typically designed to ensure that they match the parent population in terms of these different variables. All of the studies reviewed here adopted a randomised procedure for selecting their sample

²² See for example Statistics Canada, 1993.

²³ Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1988.

²⁴ *ibid*:413.

²⁵ *ibid*.

²⁶ Bland & Orn, 1986.

²⁷ Magdol, Moffitt, Caspi, Newman, Fagan & Silva, 1997.

and therefore meet the minimum requirement for drawing valid inferences about the prevalence of domestic violence in their respective populations.

2.3.1 United States of America

The National Family Violence Survey 1975/76²⁸ was made up of 2,143 respondents who were currently married or cohabiting people aged between 18 and 65. “Frequently the nature of the respondent is determined adventitiously. For example, Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz (1980) obtained information from whichever spouse was (at) home and willing to provide it. Thus, if the wife was the respondent, she provided information about herself and her husband. Data provided by husbands were then combined with those provided by wives”²⁹.

The National Family Violence Re-survey 1985³⁰ consisted of respondents who were over the age of 18, currently married or cohabiting, divorced or separated within the past two years, or a single parent living with a child under the age of 18. The National Survey of Families and Households 1987/88³¹ selected respondents who were aged 19 or over who were living in households. The sub-sample of 5,474 was limited to married primary respondents who were living with spouses. The National Youth Survey³² selected respondents who were either married or unmarried but cohabiting with a person of the opposite sex for any part of the referent year to respond to items pertaining to partner violence. In 1983, when respondents were 18 to 24 years old, 32% of the total 1,496 persons interviewed were married or cohabiting. Of those coupled, 37% were men and 63% were women. In 1986, 52% of the 1,384 respondents were aged 21 to 27 years and were coupled. Of those, 44% were men and 56% were women. In 1989, when the sample was 24 to 30, 67% of the 1,436 respondents were coupled; of these, 47% were men and 53% were women. Finally, in 1992, approximately 75% of the 1,340 respondents aged 27 to 33 years were married or cohabiting; of these, 49% were men and 51% were women.

²⁸ Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980.

²⁹ Geffner, Rosenbaum & Hughes, 1988:462

³⁰ Straus & Gelles, 1986.

³¹ Brush, 1990.

³² Morse, 1995.

2.3.2 Britain

The 1994 MORI Survey in the UK³³ consisted of 1,978 adults, who completed the questionnaire, of which 1,865 had been in a heterosexual relationship at sometime in the past (894 men and 971 women), and 1,481 of these adults (707 men and 774 women) were in a heterosexual relationship at the time of the survey. All were aged 15 or over.

The British Crime Survey 1996³⁴ selected only respondents who were currently, or had been, in an 'intimate' relationship to respond to the domestic violence component. Same sex relationships were counted. Although only incidents between 'intimates' were measured, the intention was to distinguish those between people living together, people who were married and people no longer in relationships. "In the event, due to a routing error in the CASI programme, it was not possible to distinguish between current and former relationships"³⁵. The age range was between 16 and 59 years.

2.3.3 Canada

In the 1981 Calgary Survey³⁶, the 1,124 respondents were heterosexual couples (either cohabiting or married - no distinction was made), and no minimum age was given. In the Edmonton Survey 1981³⁷, of the 1,200 interviewed, 489 (41%) were male, and 711 (59%) female; 229 (19%) had never cohabited or been married, and 726 (60.5%) were currently living with an intimate partner. The respondents were aged 18 and over.

2.3.4 New Zealand

The 1972-3 Dunedin Survey³⁸ consisted of 51% females and 49% males of which 71% were dating, 26% were cohabiting and 3% were married. The cohort was 21 years old.

2.4 Measurement Instrument

Before discussing the various types of measurement instrument used in the selected surveys, it is useful to clarify the definitions of partner violence which we use in this report. As the term

³³ Carrado et al., 1996.

³⁴ Mirrlees-Black, 1999.

³⁵ *ibid*:5.

³⁶ Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1988.

³⁷ Bland & Orn, 1986.

³⁸ Magdol et al., 1997.

is normally used, domestic violence covers any violence occurring in the home, be it between siblings, parent and child, or spouses. However the purpose of this study is to establish the findings of prevalence surveys carried out on men and women concerning their violent behaviour in intimate relationships. This is narrower in scope than domestic violence generally since it excludes violence between siblings or between parents and children, but broader in scope since it includes violence not only between spouses but also between dating, separated and divorced couples about their current and life-time experience of domestic violence. Although we have not included surveys on dating *per se*, much of the data includes information from individuals who were not living with their partners at the time of the survey and this group would include people who may be single, separated, divorced and widowed.

Collecting data on domestic violence is a delicate exercise because respondents may be unwilling to disclose or discuss their victimisation or perpetration of domestic violence. For that reason, considerable sensitivity is needed, not only in devising the research instrument but also in doing the fieldwork. All of the studies reviewed here collected data on physical violence; some included threats of violence and others covered psychological violence; one study collected data on sexual violence although this is sometimes treated separately from research on domestic violence *per se*. The effect of excluding sexual violence from the measurement of prevalence may underestimate the rate of violence against women – since women are more likely to experience sexual violence than men³⁹ – although the underestimation is unlikely to be great since sexual violence is often accompanied by physical violence and measured as such⁴⁰.

The main procedure used to collect data on domestic violence is to ask respondents about the frequency with which they have experienced a specified list of violent or aggressive acts – either as a victim or as a perpetrator – in their present or previous intimate relationships. The most commonly used such list is called the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) and is displayed in Box 2.1; the original version was called CTS N⁴¹; the revised version was called CTS R*⁴² and the most recent version is called CTS 2⁴³. This scale was developed and subsequently refined in the US during the 1970s and 1980s by Straus, Gelles and colleagues at the Family Research Laboratory in the University of New Hampshire⁴⁴. The scale covers broadly similar items to

³⁹ Mirrlees-Black, 1999; Statistics Canada, 2000; Stets and Pirog-Good, 1989.

⁴⁰ Kelleher and O'Connor, 1995:viii.

⁴¹ Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980.

⁴² Straus & Gelles, 1988.

⁴³ Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy & Sugarman, 1996.

⁴⁴ See Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz, 1980; Straus and Gelles, 1986; Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy and Sugarman, 1996.

that used in other listings of violent acts such as the UK MORI Survey. Research by Straus found that the CTS has “construct validity” in that it “produces findings that are consistent with theoretical or empirical propositions about the variable that the instrument purports to measure”⁴⁵.

Box 2.1 The Conflict Tactics Scales: Couple Form R*

No matter how well a couple get along, there are times when they disagree, get annoyed with the other person, or just have spats or fights because they're in a bad mood or tired or for some other reason. They also use many different ways of trying to settle their differences. I'm going to read some things that you and your (spouse/partner) might do when you have an argument. I would like you to tell me how many times in the past 12 months you: Thinking back over the last 12 months you've been together, was there ever an occasion when (your spouse/partner)..... Tell me how often (he/she) did...
REASONING INDEX
A. Discussed an issue calmly
B. Got information to back up your/his/her side of things
C. Brought in, or tried to bring in, someone to help settle things
PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE INDEX
D. Insulted or swore at him/her/you
E. Sulked or refused to talk about an issue
F. Stomped out of the room or house or yard
G. Cried
H. Did or said something to spite him/her/you
I. Threatened to hit or throw something at him/her/you
J. Threw or smashed or hit or kicked something
PHYSICAL VIOLENCE INDEX
Minor Violence
K. Threw something at him/her/you
L. Pushed, grabbed or shoved him/her/you
M. Slapped him/her/you
Severe Violence
N. Kicked, bit or hit him/her/you
O. Hit or tried to hit him/her/you with something
P. Beat him/her/you
Q. Choked him/her/you *
R. Threatened him/her/you with a knife or gun
S. Used knife or fired a gun
* The Item 'Choked him/her/you' was an addition made to the CTS N Aggression Index.

Source: Gelles and Straus, 1988.

There has been considerable debate about the most valid and reliable way of measuring domestic violence and, appropriately, the CTS and similar scales have been discussed in that context. In his testing of the CTS, Straus⁴⁶ found that its reliability is highest for the Physical Violence Index, lowest for the Reasoning Index, with Psychological Aggression Index holding an intermediate position. He also found that differences in reliability between these three elements of the CTS “are largely a function of the number of items in each scale”⁴⁷. However it has been difficult to measure the “concurrent validity” of the CTS – that is the degree to

⁴⁵ Straus, 1990a:69-70.

⁴⁶ Straus, 1990c.

which the new instrument is related to other presumably valid instruments - since few other instruments have been designed to measure domestic violence. Interestingly, it has also been found that “social desirability” presents little threat to the validity of the CTS⁴⁸ although there tends to be large discrepancies between the reports of violence given by husbands and by wives with men reporting less violence than women⁴⁹. We discuss this issue in more detail in the next chapter where its impact on prevalence rates is examined by separately estimating the rates of domestic violence based on women’s self-report and men’s self-report. Straus acknowledges that the CTS is “far from perfect” but is “the best available instrument to measure intrafamily violence” because of the supportive research evidence on “stable factor structure, moderate reliability and concurrent validity and the strong evidence of construct validity”⁵⁰.

One group of researchers who used the CTS to measure family violence among Swedish psychiatric in-patients concluded that “the CTS is a reliable and valid instrument for measuring domestic violence”⁵¹. Similarly, one of the authors of the UK MORI study observed that “the CTS is extensively used and validated in research”⁵². Another researcher who developed an alternative scale to measure domestic violence – with separate listings for men and women - has also acknowledged that the CTS is “relatively sound” even though “several shortcomings remain”⁵³. The balance of evidence therefore suggests that the CTS is an adequate measure of domestic violence and certainly as good if not better than any of its alternatives; at the same time, like all research instruments, the results which it produces need to be interpreted with care.

The CTS is a self-report instrument capable of measuring prevalence and frequencies of violent behaviour, both psychological and physical, and has been found to be acceptable with respondents; it is also capable of being used to measure the intensity of domestic violence but is rarely used to the fullest extent possible for this purpose in prevalence studies. Although prevalence rates tend to vary directly with the number of items on the list – such that longer lists produce higher prevalence rates - there are certain items in the CTS which invariably happen if more severe acts have been committed.

⁴⁷ *ibid*:63.

⁴⁸ *ibid*:69; see also Arias and Beach, 1987:147; Resick and Reese, 1986.

⁴⁹ See Stets and Straus, 1990a:162; Szinovacz, 1983; Jouriles & O’Leary, 1985; Edleson & Brygger, 1986.

⁵⁰ Straus, 1990c:71-2.

⁵¹ Bergman & Ericsson, 1996:169.

⁵² George, 1998a.

With regard to definitions of violent behaviour, surveys have used terms such as assault, abuse and aggression. In this study, we have defined violent behaviour as being both physical and psychological. Psychological violence includes acts which are meant to symbolically hurt, such as “threw or smashed or hit or kicked something”⁵⁴. Physical violence can denote anything from a gentle slap to the use of a knife or gun; it is defined as “an act carried out with the intention or perceived intention of physically hurting another person”⁵⁵. Physical violence can be minor or severe: “The distinction between minor and severe assaults is roughly parallel to the legal distinction between ‘simple assault’ and ‘aggravated assault’. An aggravated assault is an attack that is likely to cause grave bodily harm, such as an attack with a knife or gun, regardless of whether the object of the attack was actually injured”⁵⁶. Although there is a difficulty with this distinction since the potential damage done by a ‘strong’ male who claims to have used only minor violence could be much greater than that done by a ‘weaker’ female under that category; nevertheless the distinction is useful in differentiating the various types of violent acts.

2.4.1 United States of America

The 1975/76 National Family Violence Survey⁵⁷ was the first national survey to use CTS which was designed to measure a variety of behaviours used in conflicts between intimate partners, (as well as between those respondents and other family members). The focus on conflicts - rather than violence - was intended to enhance its acceptability to respondents⁵⁸. “Since almost everyone recognises that families have conflicts and disagreements, this serves as the first step in legitimising responses”⁵⁹. The tactics fall into three general modes: rational discussion, termed Reasoning; verbal or nonverbal acts that symbolically hurt the other, termed Psychological Violence; and the use of physical aggression, termed Physical Violence. The CTS items were selected to represent acts of increasing degrees of coerciveness. The definition of violence as defined by Gelles⁶⁰ is: “an act carried out with the intention or perceived intention of physically hurting another person”⁶¹. The CTS is now the most widely used method of obtaining data about physical violence in families⁶².

⁵³ Marshall, 1992:190.

⁵⁴ Straus & Gelles, 1988.

⁵⁵ Gelles and Straus, 1979 cited by Gelles, 1990:21.

⁵⁶ Straus, 1990c:58.

⁵⁷ Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980.

⁵⁸ Straus, 1990:51.

⁵⁹ Straus 1979:78-79.

⁶⁰ Gelles, 1990:21.

⁶¹ Gelles & Straus, 1979.

The National Family Violence Re-survey 1985⁶³ changed the CTS N questionnaire (which was used in the 1975 National Family Violence Survey) by adding a severe violence question: “whether you have ever been choked or have choked your partner” (and renamed it the CTS R*). Another change made to the original CTS N questionnaire was that the response category ‘never’ must now be volunteered by the respondent, rather than being presented as the first response category. The response categories to each question were changed to: 1= once; 2 = twice; 3 = 3-5 times; 4 = 6-10 times; 5 = 11-20 times and 6 = More than 20 times; 7= never). This change was made because it tends to increase the response rate to sensitive or deviant behaviour.

The 1985 National Family Violence Survey also included a ‘Context Measure’. Respondents were asked, “Let’s talk about the last time you and your partner got into a physical fight (Most Violent Act). In that particular instance, who started the physical conflict, you or your partner?”. In Chapter Three we report the findings on context in terms of which partner initiated the violence.

In the National Survey of Families and Households⁶⁴, a self-enumerated section was included in the total questionnaire which posed questions about couple relationships and how they handle disagreements. The first two asked about violent acts: “During the past year, how many fights with your partner resulted in you hitting, shoving, or throwing things at him/her?” and “During the past year, how many fights with your partner resulted in him/her hitting, shoving, or throwing things at you?” These two questions were coded on a frequency scale (none, once, twice, three or more times), but because of the rareness of the event, they were recoded as dichotomous variables. The second two asked about injurious outcomes: “Have you ever been cut, bruised or seriously injured in a fight with your partner?” and “Has your partner ever been cut, bruised or seriously injured in a fight with you?” These two questions were coded as dichotomous variables. Both pairs of questions followed what was intended to act as a sort question about how often disagreements became ‘physical’ and thus were supposed to be answered only if fights actually ‘became physical’⁶⁵.

The National Youth Survey⁶⁶ was a study of self-reported problem behaviour, part of which contained the original (1975-6) CTS N questionnaire which excludes the item on choking.

⁶² Straus, 1990:5.

⁶³ Straus & Gelles, 1986.

⁶⁴ Brush, 1990.

⁶⁵ *ibid*:60.

⁶⁶ Morse, 1995.

Also included in the survey were physical injury measures: “In how many of these fights (during the last year) have you felt that you were in danger of being physically hurt?”; “In how many of these fights were you (your spouse or partner) physically injured, e.g. knocked down, bruised, scratched, cut, choked, bones broken, eyes or teeth injured?”, and “In how many of these fights in which you (your spouse/partner) were physically injured did you (he/she) go to a doctor, clinic or hospital for medical treatment?”. Respondents were also asked who was responsible or to blame for starting the fight (which involved physical violence), they were asked whether both partners engaged in some sort of physical force; and who used/initiated the physical force during the fight.

2.4.2 Britain

The MORI Survey⁶⁷ questionnaire on physical violence was derived from the CTS N, and was based on the concept of a progressive series of escalating levels of possible conflict as used by the CTS⁶⁸. The items used were as follows:

1. Your partner has, with some force, pushed, grabbed, bitten, scratched, or shoved you (you have, with some force, pushed etc.) which is equivalent to CTS Item L.
2. Your partner has slapped you (you slapped your partner) is equivalent to CTS Item M.
3. Your partner has punched or kicked you (you have punched or kicked your partner) which is equivalent to CTS Item N.
4. Your partner has thrown a heavy object at you, smashed something over you, or hit you with a heavy object (you have thrown...etc.) which is equivalent to CTS Item O.
5. Your partner has struck you with a sharp or pointed object (you have struck...etc.) which is equivalent to part of CTS N Item R, i.e. "used a knife".

Respondents were asked about violent acts (both sustained and perpetrated) in any of their heterosexual relationships; and about victimisation sustained in their current relationships. They were also asked about the severity of the violence, though not the frequency. However, some evidence of multiple victimisation (sustained or inflicted) was derived by identifying the numbers of individuals reporting more than one category of assault. There was also a question with eight optional answers about the reasons and context for domestic violence as perceived by respondents and their partners.

In the 1996 British Crime Survey⁶⁹, the Computer-Assisted Self-Interviewing (CASI) measure was used. It has a two-stage structure. The first set of questions explored whether the

⁶⁷ Carrado et al., 1996.

⁶⁸ Straus, 1979.

respondent had ever been sworn at or insulted by a current or former partner; had things said to them that frightened them, such as threats to harm their children; had any physical force used against them by a current or former partner, such as grabbing, pushing, shaking or hitting; and, for those who had had force used against them in the previous year, whether they had been injured, even slightly, on any of these occasions. Limitations on the length of CASI questionnaires precluded collecting details of serious threats⁷⁰. The second set of questions asked the respondent to describe the nature and circumstances of the most recent incident they had experienced, however long ago this was⁷¹. It is also worth pointing out that the CASI questionnaire included a question on sexual assault which is not normally included in estimating the prevalence of domestic violence.

The questions that might be comparable to the CTS include:

“Now we would like you to answer a few questions about the most recent occasion on which your partner (ex-partner) used force against you even if the incident was not very serious...On this most recent occasion:

1. were you pushed, shoved or grabbed in any way?; (CTS Item L)
2. were you kicked, slapped or hit with a fist?; (CTS Items M & N)
3. was anything thrown at you?; (CTS Item K)
4. were you threatened with anything (such as a stick or knife)?; (CTS R* Item R)
5. were you choked, strangled or suffocated?; (CTS R* Item Q)
6. were you hit with anything (such as a stick)? (CTS Item O)”

Unlike the CTS N and R indices, the analysis was not divided into minor and severe assaults, but all violent acts.

2.4.3 Canada

The Calgary Survey⁷² used the original CTS N Physical Violence Index, but for specific violent acts replaced Item K with Item I (although the authors do not explicitly allude to this alteration). With regard to Psychological Violence items, Verbal Aggression included “insulted or swore” (CTS Item D), “yelled” (which is not included in the CTS Psychological Violence Index) and “did or said something to spite” (CTS Item H) while Symbolic Aggression included: “cried” (CTS Item G), “walked out” (CTS Item F) and “sulked or

⁶⁹ Mirrlees-Black, 1999.

⁷⁰ *ibid*:5.

⁷¹ *ibid*:12-13.

⁷² Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1988.

refused to talk” (CTS Item E). Thus CTS Items I and J are not included in their index. The study also identified mutual abuse, and marital satisfaction.

The Edmonton Survey⁷³ used a diagnostic interview schedule (DIS), an interview instrument constructed to make DSM III diagnoses. With regard to domestic violence, the diagnosis is based on whether the person has ever met the criteria. The questions relating to this study were: “Did you ever hit or throw things at your (husband/wife/partner)?”; “Were you ever the one who hit or threw things first, regardless of who started the argument?”; and “Did you hit or throw things first on more than one occasion?”.

2.4.4 New Zealand

The Dunedin Survey⁷⁴ was a longitudinal investigation of the health, development and behaviour of a complete cohort of births between 1972 and 1973. Magdol and colleagues “selected 13 variables from five life domains that have been robustly linked to partner violence in clinical studies and community surveys: socio-economic status, social ties, substance abuse, mental health and criminality”⁷⁵. The measurement instrument to study partner violence was the CTS R* without the Reasoning component. The respondents were only asked about the previous year.

2.5 Method of Data Collection

The methods of data collection include face-to-face interviewing, telephone interviews, pen and paper self-completion questionnaires and computer-assisted self-interviews. Each method has an influence on the response rate but is also critical to the reliability of responses. For example, anonymity is an important influence on whether or not questions are answered truthfully. If a spouse who has perpetrated violence against the respondent is likely to overhear responses in a face-to-face interview, for example, then fear will undoubtedly inhibit truthfulness and may even put the respondent in danger of further violence. Some of the problems which arise with self-completion questionnaires concern eye-sight, literacy and comprehension; at the same time, giving help to the respondent can interfere with anonymity. For example, in the British Crime Survey Computer Assisted Self-Interviewing (CASI) component “those who....completed the questionnaire with someone else's assistance had

⁷³ Bland & Orn, 1986.

⁷⁴ Magdol et al., 1997.

⁷⁵ *ibid*:69

lower rates of domestic victimisation”⁷⁶. Telephone interviews are less costly than face-to-face interviews and, because of its perceived anonymity, “the telephone leads to more truthfulness and, therefore, increased reporting of violence”⁷⁷. However the disadvantage is that “telephone interviews cannot reasonably expect to keep subjects on the telephone for much more than 35 minutes”⁷⁸.

2.5.1 United States of America

The National Family Violence Survey 1975-6⁷⁹, the National Survey of Families and Households⁸⁰, the National Youth Survey⁸¹ all used face-to-face interviews, whilst the National Family Violence Re-survey 1985⁸² interviewed respondents by telephone.

2.5.2 Britain

In the MORI Survey⁸³, the total survey was conducted as a face-to-face interview whilst the questions relating to conflict tactics in personal relationships was administered as a self-completion instrument.

In the British Crime Survey⁸⁴, following the main interview on crime which was conducted by an interviewer in the usual way, a laptop computer was passed to the respondent, who read the questions regarding domestic violence on the screen and inputted their responses directly into the computer. This self-completion questionnaire using a lap-top computer is known as CASI or Computer-Assisted Self-Interviewing.

2.5.3 Canada

In the Calgary Survey⁸⁵, the interviewer selected one partner of the couple to be interviewed on demographic information while the other was asked to complete a self-administered questionnaire on family conflict and violence in another part of the dwelling. The Edmonton Survey⁸⁶ was carried out using face-to-face interviews.

⁷⁶ Mirrlees-Black, 1999:97.

⁷⁷ Straus & Gelles, 1990:123.

⁷⁸ *ibid*:23.

⁷⁹ Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980.

⁸⁰ Brush, 1990.

⁸¹ Morse, 1995.

⁸² Straus & Gelles, 1986.

⁸³ Carrado et al., 1996.

⁸⁴ Mirrlees-Black, 1999.

⁸⁵ Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1988

⁸⁶ Bland & Orn, 1986.

2.5.4 New Zealand

In the Dunedin Survey⁸⁷, respondents were asked to enter their responses to each question on a private answer sheet while the interviewer read each item aloud.

2.6 Research Design

With one exception, all of the surveys were cross-sectional, that is they took place at one point in time; the exception is the National Youth Survey⁸⁸, of which the data for four years (1983, 1986, 1989 and 1992) were analysed. The significance of research design is that in longitudinal studies, respondents become accustomed to answering intimate questions and may be more forthcoming over time. The respondents in the Dunedin Survey⁸⁹ had been interviewed on several occasions prior to being questioned about domestic violence, and “had, in the past, repeatedly reported...on sensitive topics such as sexual behaviour. Because there has never been a violation of confidentiality, they were willing to provide frank reports”⁹⁰. However, Gelles⁹¹ describes in some detail the difficulties in carrying out longitudinal and panel studies and concluded that “in the end, the cost and effort of conducting prospective longitudinal research on an issue with a base rate as low as family violence poses a major obstacle to fielding such research”⁹².

2.7 Unit of Analysis

The use of individual data versus within-couple data is another issue. Whilst data using either unit of analysis can be analysed for gender bias in self-reporting, data from couples give a more reliable picture about interspousal agreement, as well as gender bias in self-reporting. Couple data have also provided valuable information about the unidirectionality or reciprocity (e.g. mutual violence) of intimate violence. One of the factors which complicates research not only on domestic violence but on marital and couple relationships generally is that “there is ample evidence that spouses differ substantially in their answers to seemingly objective

⁸⁷ Magdol et al., 1997.

⁸⁸ Morse 1995.

⁸⁹ Magdol et al., 1997.

⁹⁰ *ibid*:70

⁹¹ Gelles, 1990:24-26.

⁹² *ibid*:26.

questions”⁹³. This problem is often obscured by the use of aggregate data (i.e. combining data from husbands and wives together) because responses from each partner may be discrepant⁹⁴.

Each of the surveys collected data from individuals with regard to their conflicts with partners, except the Calgary Survey⁹⁵ which collected data from both members of each couple in the sample.

2.8 Method of Analysis

The method of analysis determines whether data is collected from respondents concerning their victimisation or their perpetration of violence, or indeed both. If both, the results collected from, say, female victims and male perpetrators may be combined to produce data that indicates the prevalence of violent acts perpetrated by men against their female partners. Conversely, the results collected from male victims and female perpetrators may be combined to produce data that indicates the prevalence of violent acts perpetrated by women against their male partners.

2.8.1 United States of America

Both the National Family Violence Survey⁹⁶ and the National Family Violence Re-survey⁹⁷ aggregated results of respondents reporting on their own violent behaviour as well as their partners, as did the National Survey of Families and Households⁹⁸. Victim and perpetrator respondents' reports of perpetrated violence are the qualifying events⁹⁹. However, using the 1985 National Family Violence Re-survey data, Stets and Straus re-analysed reports from 5,248 currently coupled respondents, but retained separate data from victims and perpetrators, as suggested by Hornung and colleagues¹⁰⁰. This method of analysis was also used for the Dunedin survey in New Zealand.

Similarly in the National Youth Survey¹⁰¹, respondents reported on their own violent behaviour as well as that of their partner, providing information on both male and female victimisation and perpetration. Morse gave a fuller explanation of the method of analysis than

⁹³ Szinovacz, 1983.

⁹⁴ Klein, 1982; see also Geffner et al., 1988:467.

⁹⁵ Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1988.

⁹⁶ Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980.

⁹⁷ Straus & Gelles, 1986.

⁹⁸ Brush, 1990.

⁹⁹ Morse, 1995:257.

¹⁰⁰ Hornung, McCullough & Sugimoto, 1981.

did the researchers in the preceding surveys: “The annual prevalence rates for partner violence include respondent's reports of both their own as well as their partner's behaviour. Thus, the prevalence rates for male-to-female violence represent the proportion of respondents who reported being the offender or victim of at least one male perpetrated assault during the target study year. For example, a male respondent report of a single assault on his partner during the past year would qualify as one or more annual incidents of male-to-female violence, as would a female respondent report of similar behaviour by her male partner”¹⁰².

2.8.2 Britain

Data on both victimisation and perpetration were obtained from the MORI Survey¹⁰³ for questions relating to all heterosexual relationships that the respondent had experienced. For questions relating simply to their current relationship, data was obtained on the respondents' victimisation only. The British Crime Survey¹⁰⁴ obtained information from respondents on their victimisation though not their perpetration of violent acts, except in the index relating to who (respondent or partner) initiated the physical violence.

2.8.3 Canada

In the Calgary Survey¹⁰⁵, each partner in a couple was asked questions on their perpetration of violent acts only. Thus data were obtained on the victimisation of the ‘other’ partner from data given by the respondent. The Edmonton Survey¹⁰⁶ obtained information from respondents on their perpetration of violent acts only.

2.8.4 New Zealand

Finally, in the Dunedin Survey¹⁰⁷, data was obtained from each respondent on their victimisation and abusive behaviour and was not aggregated.

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to clarify differences in methodology in each of the selected surveys. Achieved sample sizes range from over 13,000 (US National Survey of Families &

¹⁰¹ Morse, 1995.

¹⁰² *ibid*:257.

¹⁰³ Carrado et al., 1996.

¹⁰⁴ Mirrlees-Black, 1999.

¹⁰⁵ Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1988.

¹⁰⁶ Bland & Orn, 1986.

Households) to just over 1,000 (New Zealand, Dunedin Survey). Response rates range from 64% in the US National Family Violence Survey to 97% in the British Crime Survey 1996 (See Table 2.1) With regard to sample characteristics, the minimum age ranged from 15 in the British Crime Survey to 27 in the 1992 wave of the US National Youth Survey. Relationship status varied from including only respondents who were married and living with their spouses (US National Survey of Families & Households), to all respondents who were cohabiting, married, recently separated, divorced or those who were single parents (US National Family Violence Re-Survey) and to those who were or had been in an intimate relationship including dating (e.g. the British Crime Survey).

All the surveys either used the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS N or CTS R*) or a derivation of the CTS, except one which included four questions on physical violence between intimates in the Diagnostic Interview Schedule (the Edmonton Survey in Canada). All the surveys used a cross-sectional research design apart from the US National Youth Survey which re-interviewed a cohort sample four times over nine years.

All the surveys interviewed individuals about their intimate relationships, except the Calgary Survey in Canada, which interviewed both partners. However, that survey and the Edmonton Survey, were the only two which simply interviewed respondents on their perpetration of violent acts against intimate partners. The British Crime Survey interviewed respondents on their victimisation only while the British MORI Survey interviewed respondents on victimisation by current partners as well as both victimisation and perpetration over all their intimate relationships. The other surveys interviewed all respondents about both victimisation and perpetration.

While the studies covered in this review are not strictly comparable on all of the key dimensions of domestic violence, they are comparable on the key issue of the prevalence of domestic violence between men and women.

Overall, the studies reviewed here are statistically robust in terms of their achieved sample size and response rate and can be taken as a good representation of their respective populations. Although domestic violence has some unique features - and may not be fully captured in representative sample populations, however robust, - these studies nevertheless meet all the standards of good practice in terms of research methodology and can be taken as representative of the vast majority of their respective populations.

¹⁰⁷ Magdol et al., 1997.

Chapter Three

What is the Prevalence of Domestic Violence Against Men?

“Conflict can be creative. I do not imagine a world without conflict. I do have a vision of a world without violence”

Center for NonViolent Communication, Texas, USA (www.cnvc.org)

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter we report on the prevalence of domestic violence against men as revealed in nine major surveys. This is done under seven different headings with a separate section devoted to each. Under each of these headings we have constructed a common matrix of the key findings from each study so that cross-study comparisons can be made (see Tables 3.1-3.10). Before discussing the results in detail, it is necessary to consider a fundamental issue affecting all of the data in this chapter namely the truthfulness of self-reports by men and women on their own victimisation and perpetration (section 3.2). In the light of these considerations, we summarise the key findings from the different studies under the following headings: total physical assault (section 3.3), severe physical violence (section 3.4), minor physical violence (section 3.5), initiator of total physical violence (section 3.6), psychological aggression and use of threats (section 3.7), injury and medical treatment (section 3.8), and frequency of acts of physical violence (section 3.9). In some of the studies, the term ‘assault’ is used synonymously with severe physical violence; in this study we use only the latter term in order to maintain consistency.

3.2 Reliability of Self-Reports on Victimisation and Perpetration

It is generally agreed that self-reports on victimisation and perpetration by both partners in a relationship offers an ideal way of determining the true prevalence of domestic violence in an intimate relationship. This however still encounters the difficulty that both men and women may under-report their own perpetration and over-report their own victimisation. In an effort to study this problem in more depth, Szinovacz¹ compared reports by each member of a couple and found that couples were more likely to agree upon the non-occurrence of physical violence and whether the female partner used violence (and if so, the type) than whether the male partner did. “Reliability between husbands and wives was (also) calculated by

¹ Szinovacz, 1983

Rosenbaum and O'Leary (1981) to assess whether the data was accurate. The results indicated only moderate levels of agreement (just under 50%) between spouses².

The tendency of both men and women to under-report their own perpetration and over-report their own victimisation is known as the “offender effect” and has been found in three of the studies reviewed here: the US National Youth Survey³, the British MORI Survey⁴ and the Dunedin Survey in New Zealand⁵. In aggregate terms, the offender effect creates the anomalous situation where fewer acts of violence are perpetrated than are sustained. For example, the US National Youth Survey found that “the rate of minor male-to-female violence reported by men is generally higher than that reported by women and the rate of severe male-to-female violence reported by men is generally lower than that reported by women. However, the same pattern holds true for the women respondents reporting on their own minor and severe violence toward men. Thus there appears to be an ‘offender effect’ rather than a ‘gender effect’ in reporting violence, with each sex generally overstating their own minor aggressive behaviour toward their partner (compared to that reported by the opposite sex) and understating their own severe violence⁶”.

There is also some evidence of a “gender effect” over and above the offender effect. This can be difficult to quantify unless one is using couple data where both partners are invited to report on both perpetration and victimisation. In practice, the gender effect tends to be measured by comparing the difference between (1) self-reported male perpetration and self-reported female victimisation on the one hand and (2) self-reported female perpetration and self-reported male victimisation on the other hand. Of the nine studies which we review in this report, four of them allow us to assess the gender effect for severe domestic violence. Two of the studies – the 1985 US Family Violence Re-Survey⁷ and the 1972/73 Dunedin Survey in New Zealand⁸ - provide evidence that men under-report their perpetration given that the proportion of females reporting victimisation is well in excess of the proportion of men reporting perpetration. This finding has also been confirmed by other studies, both community-based⁹ and clinic-based¹⁰. However it is not confirmed by either the MORI survey in the UK or the

² Geffner et al., 1988:462.

³ Morse, 1995.

⁴ Carrado et al., 1996.

⁵ Magdol, et al., 1997.

⁶ Morse 1995:259; see also Riggs et al., 1989; Browning & Dutton, 1986.

⁷ Stets & Straus, 1990a:156.

⁸ Magdol et al., 1997.

⁹ Szinovacz, 1983.

¹⁰ Jouriles & O'Leary, 1985.

US National Youth Survey. The 1994 MORI Survey in the UK¹¹ found no gender effect since men and women equally under-report their perpetration. The remaining study – the 1983/92 US National Youth Survey¹² which involved four longitudinal phases – found that in three of the four phases, women were more likely to under-report perpetration since the number of men who reported victimisation exceeded the number of women who reported perpetration. Thus it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions about the precise size and direction of the gender effect in the reporting of domestic violence.

These different studies point to two conclusions. First, there is conclusive evidence of offender bias in reporting domestic violence such that both men and women may under-report their own perpetration and over-report their own victimisation. Second, there is less conclusive evidence of gender bias in reporting domestic violence since some studies show that men tend to under-report their own perpetration but other studies show that women under-report their perpetration. Typically it is not possible to do anything about offender bias or gender bias in data that has already been collected except to be aware of its implications in the analysis and to test for its impact by separately calculating prevalence rates based on the self-reports of both men and women. That is what we have done in all of the tables in this chapter.

3.3 Total Physical Assault

Total physical violence in a relationship involves summing the rate that is calculated from the total number of acts either sustained or inflicted by the respondent in a current or previous relationship. The prevalence rates of total physical violence typically gives us information on the number of acts which occurred within the relationship in the year prior to the survey. However, in three surveys (US Survey of Families and Households; the British MORI Survey; the Edmonton Survey in Canada) the question was asked in relation to the entirety of the current relationship. Respondents in the British MORI Survey were also asked about violent acts inflicted or sustained over their life-time in intimate relationships.

In all but one of the studies, as summarised in Table 3.1, the results show that the prevalence of total physical violence of women against men is consistently higher than those of men against women. The only exception to this (the US National Family Violence Survey 1975-76), involves a minor difference that is not statistically significant. In global terms, therefore,

¹¹ Carrado et al., 1996.

¹² Morse, 1995.

Table 3.1 Prevalence of Total Physical Violence In Representative Samples of Men and Women

Data Source Country Year	Authors & Year	Total Physical Violence					
		Last Year			Life-Time		
		F to M	M to F	Both	F to M	M to F	Both
1. US National Family Violence Survey, 1975/76	Straus , Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980; Straus & Gelles, 1986:Table 2 1990:Table 7.2 'Both': Gelles, 1987:37	11.6	12.1	16.0*			28.0*
2.1 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Straus & Gelles, 1988;Table 1.1 1990:Table 6.1 'Both': Gelles, 1997:75	12.4	11.6	16.1*			28.0*
2.2 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Stets & Straus, 1990a						
2.3 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Straus, 1993:68-9	12.4p	12.2v				
2.4 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Stets & Straus, 1989/1990b:233 Cohabiting (237)	9.3 (26.9)	7.2 (20.7)	18.1φ (52.4) φ			
2.5 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Stets & Straus, 1989/1990b:233 Married (5005)	4.2 (28.6)	3.4 (23.2)	7.1φ (48.2) φ			
3. US National Survey of Families & Households, 1987-88	Brush, 1990:61*	3.4	2.9				
4.1 US National Youth Survey, 1983	Morse, 1995 Table 1	48.0 (32.6)	36.7 (11.9)	54.5* (54.8)φ			
4.2 US National Youth Survey, 1986	Morse, 1995 Table 1	41.4 (31.6)	31.4 (9.9)	45.9* (58.4)φ			
4.3 US National Youth Survey, 1989	Morse, 1995 Table 1	35.0 (29.7)	27.9 (11.8)	39.8* (58.5)φ			
4.4 US National Youth Survey, 1992	Morse, 1995 Table 1	27.9 (37.7)	20.2 (13.9)	32.4* (48.5)φ			
5. British MORI Survey, 1994	Carrado et al., 1996:Table I*	11.2v	4.5v		10.9p 17.3v	9.5p 13.4v	6.0φ
6. British Crime Survey, 1996	Mirrlees-Black, 1999:T.A.3.1	4.2v	4.2v	4.2v*	14.9v	22.7v	19.0v*
7.1 Canada, Calgary Survey, 1981	Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1988:T2	13.2p (35.2p)	10.3p (27.3p)	14.3p φ (37.5p)φ			
8. Canada, Edmonton Survey, 1983/84	Bland & Orn, 1986:Table II*				22.6p	14.6p	19.7p*
9. New Zealand, Dunedin Survey, 1972/73	Magdol, et al., 1997:T 1&2	37.2p 34.1v	21.8p 27.1v				

Definitions: F to M = Female to Male physical violence : M to F = Male to Female physical violence :
p = respondent is perpetrator : v = respondent is victim

* The term "both" refers to those respondents who reported experiencing domestic violence in all relationships.

φ The term "both" refers to those respondents who reported being both victim and perpetrator of domestic violence in all relationships.

§ The numbers in brackets are based on the subsample of respondents who have either been victims or perpetrators of domestic violence. The numbers in the same cells without brackets are based on the total sample of respondents in order to derive a true prevalence rate.

* Data under heading 'Last Year' relates to any time in current relationship.

the prevalence rates, based on self-reports from men and women, indicate that women are consistently more likely to be violent against men than men are towards women. As pointed out by Stets and Straus in their re-analysis of the National Family Violence Re-Survey 1985, even when they disregarded data obtained from men, “within the family, women are about as violent as men”¹³.

The prevalence rates vary enormously from as low as 2.9% male perpetrators in the US National Survey of Families and Households¹⁴ to 48% female perpetrators in the US National Youth Survey¹⁵. The huge range appears to be attributable in the main to age differences in the samples. Barbara Morse suggests that “sample age appears to be a major factor contributing to observed prevalence rate differences. While the National Family Violence Survey sample ages range from 18-70 for both of the 1975-76 and 1985 surveys, the National Youth Survey sample ages range from lows of 18 to 24 in 1983, ages at which partner violence rates are at their peak, to 27 to 33 in 1992, ages at which partner violence among National Youth Survey respondents, while still high, has noticeably decreased”¹⁶. However Stets and Straus have shown that, even when age is controlled for, “the greater risk of assault typically occurs when individuals live together but are not married”¹⁷.

The two British surveys which analysed figures about domestic violence over the course of a life-time yield quite different results. The British Crime Survey shows that men are consistently more violent than women (22.7% female victims as opposed to 14.9% male victims) but in the British MORI Survey found that women are consistently more violent than men (13.4% female victims as opposed to 17.3% male victims). This anomaly may be due to the fact that the questionnaire used by the British Crime Survey (1996) included sexual violence in calculating ‘total physical violence’ which is not normally included in estimating the prevalence of domestic violence. However, what is significant from the perspective of the present report is that both studies report quite high prevalence rates for male victims.

Overall the results from eight of the nine studies reviewed indicate that, within the general population in the US, UK, and in certain cities in Canada and New Zealand, women tend to be as violent as men in intimate relationships.

¹³ Stets & Straus, 1990a:157.

¹⁴ Brush, 1990.

¹⁵ Morse, 1995.

¹⁶ *ibid*:256.

¹⁷ Stets & Straus, 1990b:241.

3.4 Severe Physical Violence

As would be expected, the rates of severe physical violence are considerably lower than total physical violence rates since the number of severely violent acts experienced are only about a third of the total violent acts experienced during the last year. Nevertheless, as shown in Table 3.2, all but one of the studies indicate that women use more severe acts of violence against men than men do against women, both in the last year (or current relationship) and during the life-time of the respondent. In the British MORI Survey a slightly higher percentage of presently single dating women reported sustaining victimisation (i.e. being pushed or kicked) across all relationships than did single dating men (10% versus 9%). Carrado and her colleagues infer from these results that “victimisation of women by male partners is more likely for women who are single and young, while for men being married or cohabiting is most associated with assault by a female partner”¹⁸.

There is considerable variation between the studies due in large measure to sample characteristics. Barbara Morse’s study shows that women’s perpetration rates are highest when they are aged between 18 and 27¹⁹. In the 21-year-old cohort study by Lynn Magdol and her colleagues²⁰, almost one in five women (18.6%) whereas approximately one in fifteen men (5.7%) reported that they had performed an act of severe physical violence in the past year. Even if men underreport their severe violence, victimisation by severe physical violence from men was reported by only one in eight women (12.7%). The only other discrepancies appear in perpetrator and victim reports of severe violence. In Straus’s sample of married women²¹, there were similar proportions of victims and perpetrators: 5.0% claimed to have been the victims of severe violence, while 4.6% were perpetrators of severe violence against their male partners.

With regard to nonreciprocal severe violence, the first US National Family Violence Survey 1975-76 found that 4.6% of women in the sample, who were not victimised, admitted to or were reported by their male partners as having perpetrated an act of severe physical violence, as opposed to 3.8% of men²². In the second US National Family Violence Survey 1985,

¹⁸ Carrado et al., 1996.

¹⁹ Morse, 1995.

²⁰ Magdol et al., 1997.

²¹ Straus, 1993.

²² Straus et al., 1980:40-41.

Table 3.2 Prevalence of Severe Physical Violence In Representative Samples of Men and Women

Data Source Country Year	Authors & Year	Severe Physical Violence					
		Last Year			Life-Time		
		F to M	M to F	Both	F to M	M to F	Both
1. US National Family Violence Survey, 1975/76	Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980; Straus & Gelles, 1986:Table 2 1990:Table 7.2	4.6	3.8	6.1*			
2.1 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Straus & Gelles, 1988;Table 1.1 1990:Table 6.1	4.8	3.4	6.3*			
2.2 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Stets & Straus, 1990a:Table 9.2	4.4p 4.7v	1.3p 4.9v				
2.3 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Straus, 1993:68-9	4.6p	5.0v				
2.4 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Stets & Straus, 1989/1990b: Cohabiting	4.6 (13.4)§	2.5 (7.3)§	7.6φ (22.0) §φ			
2.5 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Stets & Straus, 1989/1990b: Married	1.4 (9.6)§	0.8 (5.7)§	1.5φ (10.5) §φ			
3. US National Survey of Families & Households, 1987-88	Brush, 1990						
4.1 US National Youth Survey, 1983	Morse, 1995 Table 2	22.4 22.7p 22.0v	10.1 7.4p 11.4v	25.5*			
4.2 US National Youth Survey, 1986	Morse, 1995 Table 2	22.8 18.9p 27.7v	9.5 9.0p 10.0v	24.9*			
4.3 US National Youth Survey, 1989	Morse, 1995 Table 2	17.7 15.1p 20.8v	7.6 6.2p 8.9v	20.0*			
4.4 US National Youth Survey, 1992	Morse, 1995 Table 2	13.8 11.4p 16.3v	5.7 4.7p 6.7v	15.8*			
5. British MORI Survey, 1994	Carrado et al., 1996:Table II & Fig.1. * †	4.0v	2.0v		3.0p 7.0v 9.0S 5.0M	2.0p 6.0v 10.0S 3.0M	
6. British Crime Survey, 1996	Mirrlees-Black, 1999						
7.1 Canada, Calgary Survey, 1981	Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1988:T2	10.7p (49.6p)	4.8p (22.3p)	6.0p φ (28.1p)φ			
8. Canada, Edmonton Survey, 1983/84	Bland & Orn, 1986						
9. New Zealand, Dunedin Survey, 1972/73	Magdol, et al., 1997:T 1&2	18.6p 21.2v	5.7p 12.7v				

Definitions: F to M = Female to Male physical violence; M to F = Male to Female physical violence; p = respondent is perpetrator; v = respondent is victim.

* The term “both” refers to those respondents who reported experiencing domestic violence in all relationships.

φThe term “both” refers to respondents who reported being victim & perpetrator of domestic violence in all relationships.

§ The numbers in brackets are based on the subsample of respondents who have either been victims or perpetrators of domestic violence. The numbers in the same cells without brackets are based on the total sample of respondents in order to derive a true prevalence rate.

* Data under heading ‘Last Year’ relates to any time in current relationship.

† S = Single & dating; M = married or cohabiting; ‘Severe Physical Violence’ = Punched/kicked only.

Table 3.3 Prevalence of Minor Physical Violence In Representative Samples of Men & Women

Data Source Country Year	Authors & Year	Minor Physical Violence Last Year		
		F to M	M to F	Both
1. US National Family Violence Survey, 1975/76	Straus , Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980; 1990			
2.1 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Straus & Gelles, 1988; 1990.			
2.2 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Stets & Straus, 1990a:Table 9.2	7.7p 7.5v	9.2p 6.9v	
2.3 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Straus, 1993	7.8p	7.2v	
2.4 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Stets & Straus, 1989/1990b: Cohabiting	4.6 (13.4)	1.3 (3.5)	8.0φ (23.2)φ
2.5 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Stets & Straus, 1989/1990b: Married	2.8 (18.9)	1.1 (7.5)	4.1φ (28.3)φ
3. US National Survey of Families & Households, 1987-88	Brush, 1990			
4.1 US National Youth Survey, 1983	Morse, 1995 Table 2	46.4 28.4p 20.9v	36.4 30.1p 24.7v	
4.2 US National Youth Survey, 1986	Morse, 1995 Table 2	40.5 21.6p 14.6v	36.4 30.1p 24.7v	
4.3 US National Youth Survey, 1989	Morse, 1995 Table 2	33.4 18.1p 16.3v	27.0 21.9p 18.6v	
4.4 US National Youth Survey, 1992	Morse, 1995 Table 2	26.5 16.4p 11.6v	19.9 13.7p 15.3v	
5. British MORI Survey, 1994	Carrado et al., 1996			
6. British Crime Survey, 1996	Mirrlees-Black, 1999			
7.1 Canada, Calgary Survey, 1981	Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1988			
8. Canada, Edmonton Survey, 1983/84	Bland & Orn, 1986			
9. New Zealand, Dunedin Survey, 1972/73	Magdol et al., 1997	35.8p 31.8v	21.8p 26.1v	

Definitions: FtoM=Female to Male physical violence; MtoF=Male to Female physical violence; p=respondent is perpetrator; v = respondent is victim.

φ The term “both” refers to those respondents who reported being both victim and perpetrator of domestic violence in all relationships.

§ The numbers in brackets are calculated by the authors and are based on the subsample of respondents who have either been victims or perpetrators of domestic violence. The numbers in the same cells without brackets are calculated by us and are based on the total sample of respondents in order to derive a true prevalence rate.

exclusive violence by women occurred in 28% of the cases whereas exclusive violence by men occurred in 23% of cases²³. In the US National Youth Survey, women accounted for about two thirds of the exclusive or nonreciprocal total violence. According to the author, “over twice as many women as men reported assaulting a partner who had not assaulted them during the study year. Similar results were found for severe violence across all four years. ... Both male and female respondents were far more likely to attribute responsibility for using nonreciprocal physical violence to the women rather than to the man”²⁴. In the Calgary study in Canada, of the 121 couples who experienced severe violence, 49.6% of the sample were female partners who reported having committed severe violence against their male partners who had not perpetrated a physically violent act against them²⁵.

Relationships are at their most severely violent when the respondents are young, dating, cohabiting, single or separated. In general, the prevalence rate of severe physical violence is lower among married and older people. These variables will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Four.

3.5 Minor Physical Violence

As might be expected, the prevalence of minor violent acts is greater than the prevalence of severe violent acts, as can be seen from a comparison of Tables 3.2 and 3.3. However, with only one exception²⁶, the percentage of women perpetrating minor acts of violence in the last year was substantially higher than the corresponding percentage of men. In other words, women show a higher prevalence of minor domestic violence than men.

3.6 Initiator of Total Physical Violence

Domestic violence is usually conceptualised as the problem of men assaulting women in the interest of maintaining a culturally prescribed position of dominance within the family²⁷. Thus it is assumed that any female violence in intimate relationships is predominantly defensive or retaliatory, rather than offensive. If women do initiate violence in a relationship, then this is regarded as atypical female behaviour²⁸.

²³ Stets & Straus, 1990a:154.

²⁴ Morse, 1995:263-264.

²⁵ Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1988:421.

²⁶ Stets & Straus, 1990a.

²⁷ See for example Pagelow, 1985.

²⁸ Straus & Gelles, 1986; Pleck, Pleck, Grossman & Bart, 1978; Saunders, 1986.

Table 3.4 Initiators of Physical Violence In Representative Samples of Men and Women

Data Source Country Year	Authors & Year	Initiators of Violence			
		Last Year			
		F to M	M to F	F to M Don't Know	M to F Don't Know
1. US National Family Violence Survey, 1975/76	Straus , Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980; 1990				
2.1 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Straus & Gelles, 1988; 1990.				
2.2 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Stets & Straus, 1990a:154-5	52.7p 44.1v	42.6p 43.7v	4.7(F)	12.0(M)
2.3 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Straus, 1993				
2.4 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Stets & Straus, 1989/1990b: Cohabiting				
2.5 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Stets & Straus, 1989/1990b: Married				
3. US National Survey of Families & Households, 1987-88	Brush, 1990				
4.1 US National Youth Survey, 1983	Morse, 1995				
4.2 US National Youth Survey, 1986	Morse, 1995				
4.3 US National Youth Survey, 1989	Morse, 1995				
4.4 US National Youth Survey, 1992	Morse, 1995	54.2p 61.3v	38.7p 45.8v		
5. British MORI Survey, 1994	Carrado et al., 1996				
6. British Crime Survey, 1996	Mirrlees-Black, 1999	8.0(i) 2.0(c)	2.0(i) 2.0(c)	15.0(i) 11.0(c)	9.0(i) 12.0(c)
7.1 Canada, Calgary Survey, 1981	Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1988				
8. Canada, Edmonton Survey, 1983/84	Bland & Orn, 1986*	73.4p 42.3v	57.7p 26.6v		
9. New Zealand, Dunedin Survey, 1972/73	Magdol et al., 1997				

Definitions: F to M = Female to Male physical violence; M to F = Male to Female physical violence; p = respondent is perpetrator; v = respondent is victim; i = intermittent victim; c = chronic victim
 * Data under heading 'Last Year' relates to any time in current relationship.

Half the surveys under review asked their respondents about who initiated the violence in the last conflict. The results in Table 3.4 show, with only one exception (chronic victims in the British Crime Survey), that women were more likely to use physical violence first. According to the authors of the 1985 US National Family Violence Re-Survey “the main conclusion to be drawn from (their) findings is that women not only engage in physical violence as often as

men, but they also initiate violence *about as often* as men”²⁹. The one exception to these findings are women who suffered chronic violence in the British Crime Survey (1996): these women initiated the violence at the same rate as did males suffering chronic violence, while 8% of those women who suffer intermittent violence, initiated the violence four times more frequently than men who suffer intermittent violence.

Discovering who starts the violence does not determine whether retaliation is involved. In discussing this issue Barbara Morse wrote that “a first step to understanding the circumstances surrounding partner violence has been to use the CTS to classify men and women according to whether they reported engaging in mutual or nonreciprocal violence”³⁰. Likewise, according to Brinkerhoff and Lupri: “conjugal violence is multifaceted and is a result of conflict exchanges between couples. It takes place in an interactive context that is governed by mutual dependence and reciprocity; thus we would expect mutual violence to be more prevalent than violence committed by only one partner”³¹.

In the US National Youth Survey, when asked whether both partners used physical force during the last, most serious argument or fight that year, approximately half the respondents indicated that both partners engaged in some sort of physical force. In this regard Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz discovered from the results of the first US National Family Violence Survey (1975-6) that “the most common situation was that in which both had used violence. Of those couples reporting any violence, 49% were situations of this type, where both were violent”³².

In the British Crime Survey, victims claimed they used no force at all in 54% of incidents. Of those that had used force, 12 percent claimed they could not remember the order of events, 31% said they were attacked first and then responded, “and just 4% admitted they had attacked first (although with what provocation we do not know). Women were slightly more likely to say they had attacked first than men”³³. The findings from these surveys on initiation of violence are in line with other surveys such as that of DeMaris³⁴ although his sample was taken from a dating student population and suggest that women are at least as likely as men in all types of relationships (married, cohabiting and dating) to initiate domestic violence. A

²⁹ Stets & Straus, 1990a:155, our italics.

³⁰ Morse, 1995:263.

³¹ Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1988:421.

³² Straus et al., 1980.

³³ Mirrlees-Black, 1999:35.

³⁴ DeMaris, 1992:118.

similar finding was reported by the Irish authors of a dissertation for their MSc in social work,³⁵.

3.7 Psychological Aggression & Use of Threats

Five of the surveys under discussion measured rates of psychological violence inflicted or sustained by men and women in their intimate relationships (see Table 3.5). However, the 1985 National Family Violence Re-Survey, the Calgary Survey and the New Zealand Survey used the Psychological Aggression Index from the CTS, which includes such items as “sulked or refused to talk about an issue”. The British Crime Survey 1996 asked only two questions that amount to psychological aggression, the first about being insulted or sworn at and the second involving frightening threats. The US National Youth Survey simply asked the respondents who had experienced violence how often they felt in physical danger. The three surveys that used the psychological aggression index and the British Crime Survey question about insults and being sworn at all find that women inflict more psychological abuse on their male partners than do men on their female partners.

However, females appear to suffer far more than men when threatened with physical violence. In the National Youth Survey “approximately 30% of the women reasoned that they felt in physical danger one or more times in each study year, compared to less than 15% of men”³⁶. The British Crime Survey also indicates that over three times as many women experienced frightening threats than did male respondents at some time in their lives (15.9% versus 5.1%) and in the last year (3.8% versus 1.2%). The implication of these results is that, while both sexes use psychological aggression in their relationships, “women are far more likely to be living in fear of their partners” than are men³⁷.

3.8 Injury and Medical Treatment

One criticism that was levelled at the original National Family Violence Survey 1975-76, was that it did not take account of outcomes of the violent acts³⁸. Straus conceded that, “without data on injuries, CTS scores, which show that women engage in as many assaults as men, can

³⁵ McHugh, Walsh & Cafferkey, 1999; see also Pizzey, 1998.

³⁶ Morse, 1995:268.

³⁷ Mirrlees-Black, 1999:14.

³⁸ Berk, Berk, Loseke & Rauma, 1983; Breines & Gordon, 1983; Dobash, Dobash, Wilson & Daly, 1992.

Table 3.5 Prevalence of Psychological Violence In Representative Samples of Men and Women

Data Source Country Year	Authors & Year	Psychological Violence#					
		Last Year			Life-Time		
		F to M	M to F	Both	F to M	M to F	Both
1. US National Family Violence Survey, 1975/76	Straus , Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980; 1990						
2.1 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Straus & Sweet, 1992 #	75	74				
2.2 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Stets & Straus, 1990a						
2.3 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Straus, 1993						
2.4 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Stets & Straus, 1989/1990b: Cohabiting						
2.5 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Stets & Straus, 1989/1990b: Married						
3. US National Survey of Families & Households, 1987-88	Brush, 1990						
4.1 US National Youth Survey, 1983	Morse, 1995						
4.2 US National Youth Survey, 1986	Morse, 1995						
4.3 US National Youth Survey, 1989	Morse, 1995	9.5	30.1				
4.4 US National Youth Survey, 1992	Morse, 1995	13.5	29.0				
5. British MORI Survey, 1994	Carrado et al., 1996						
6.1 British Crime Survey, 1996	Mirrlees-Black, 1999:TA.3.1	1.2v	3.8v	2.6v*	5.1v	15.9v	10.8v*
6.2 British Crime Survey, 1996	Mirrlees-Black, 1999:TA.3.1§				56.1v	49.3v	52.5v*
7.2 Canada, Calgary Survey, 1981	Grandin et al., 1998.	23.5p	13.2p	36.7pφ			
8. Canada, Edmonton Survey, 1983/84	Bland & Orn, 1986						
9. New Zealand, Dunedin Survey, 1972/73	Magdol et al., 1997 #	94.6p 89.7v	85.8p 83.8v				

Definitions: F to M = Female to Male physical violence; M to F = Male to Female physical violence;

p = respondent is perpetrator; v = respondent is victim.

* The term “both” refers to those respondents who reported experiencing domestic violence in all relationships.

φ The term “both” refers to those respondents who reported being both victim and perpetrator of domestic violence in all relationships.

Unless otherwise stated ‘Psychological Violence’ is measured using CTS R* Items D to J.

Where respondents felt in physical danger.

§ Where respondents were sworn at or insulted.

Table 3.6 Injuries Sustained Through Physical Violence In Representative Samples of Men & Women

Data Source Country Year	Authors & Year	Physical Injuries Last Year	
		F to M	M to F
1. US National Family Violence Survey, 1975/76	Straus , Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980		
2.1 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Straus & Gelles, 1988; 1990		
2.2 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Stets & Straus, 1990a:157		
2.3 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Straus, 1993:69	0.6	3.7
2.4 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Stets & Straus, 1989:Cohabiting		
2.5 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Stets & Straus, 1989: Married		
3. US National Survey of Families & Households, 1987-88	Brush, 1990*	0.4p 0.2v	0.2p 1.1v
4.1 US National Youth Survey, 1983	Morse, 1995		
4.2 US National Youth Survey, 1986	Morse, 1995	9.3p 19.6v	21.3p 21.2v
4.3 US National Youth Survey, 1989	Morse, 1995	11.7p 10.4v	14.3p 19.5v
4.4 US National Youth Survey, 1992	Morse, 1995	10.7p 13.5v	13.0p 20.1v
5. British MORI Survey, 1994	Carrado et al., 1996		
6. British Crime Survey, 1996	Mirrlees-Black, 1999:22	1.1v	2.2v
7.1 Canada, Calgary Survey, 1981	Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1988		
8. Canada, Edmonton Survey, 1983/84	Bland & Orn, 1986		
9. New Zealand, Dunedin Survey, 1972/73	Magdol et al., 1997		

Definitions: F to M = Female to Male physical injuries; M to F = Male to Female physical injuries; p = respondent is perpetrator; v = respondent is victim

* Data under heading 'Last Year' relates to any time in current relationship.

be misinterpreted as indicating that these assaults result in as much injury”³⁹. Undoubtedly, at the extremes, severe physical violence does result in injury and sometimes medical treatment. Four of the surveys included a scale to assess rates of injury caused by, and medical treatment sought for, physical violence inflicted by intimate partners. The results shown in Tables 3.6 reveal that physical violence against women was much more likely to result in injury than it was against men.

³⁹ Straus, 1990d:79.

Physical injury is much more likely to occur amongst younger couples. For example, in the National Youth Survey, the data shows that “approximately one fifth of the female respondents in all three study years reported one or more fights resulting in injury to themselves. Personal injury rates reported by men, on the other hand, were about 20% in 1986, but declined by almost half in 1989 and 1992”⁴⁰. In addition to physical injury, some studies have also found that women are more likely to suffer clinically significant symptoms of anxiety disorder as a result of severe physical violence⁴¹.

Another indication of the severity of physical violence is the use of medical treatment. Again womens’ reports show, according to Table 3.7, that they are much more likely to seek medical treatment than men, particularly those chronic victims (10.0%) as reported by Mirrlees-Black⁴².

Interestingly, there is much closer parity between male and female victims of intermittent assault in her report, similar to the findings of Morse⁴³. However, the evidence of Stets and Straus⁴⁴ indicated that women were seven and a half times more likely than men to seek medical attention for the injuries inflicted by their partners.

With regard to cross-cultural differences, while US rates of domestic violence are generally higher than are UK rates, the reverse is the case for those who seek medical attention. These results may help to throw light on the fact that women, even though they are more likely to initiate and perpetrate serious violence against men are also significantly more likely to be injured and to avail of medical treatment, even taking into account the fact that the uptake of medical treatment by men in general tends to be less than that of women⁴⁵. Clinic-based studies also indicate that, even in cases of mutual violence, women are more likely to suffer severe physical and psychological injuries than men⁴⁶.

⁴⁰ Morse, 1995:266.

⁴¹ Magdol et al., 1997; Stets & Straus,1990; Grandin, Lupri & Brinkerhoff, 1998.

⁴² Mirrlees-Black, 1999.

⁴³ Morse, 1995.

⁴⁴ Stets & Straus, 1990a.

⁴⁵ McNeely & Robinson-Simpson, 1987, but see Dobash & Dobash, 1979, for how 20% of victimised women may not seek medical help.

⁴⁶ See for example Nazroo, 1995.

Table 3.7 Medical Treatment Received as Result of Physical Violence In Representative Samples of Men and Women

Data Source Country Year	Author & Year	Treatment	
		Last Year	
		F to M	M to F
1. US National Family Violence Survey, 1975/76	Straus , Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980; 1990		
2.1 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Straus & Gelles, 1988; 1990:		
2.2 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Stets & Straus, 1990a:157	0.4	3.0
2.3 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Straus, 1993		
2.4 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Stets & Straus, 1989:Cohabiting		
2.5 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Stets & Straus, 1989: Married		
3. US National Survey of Families & Households, 1987-88	Brush, 1990		
4.1 US National Youth Survey, 1983	Morse, 1995		
4.2 US National Youth Survey, 1986	Morse, 1995:Table 8*	11.8p 3.6v	25.0p 13.2v
4.3 US National Youth Survey, 1989	Morse, 1995:Table 8*	14.3p 10.5v	20.0p 13.2v
4.4 US National Youth Survey, 1992	Morse, 1995:Table 8*	11.1p 14.3v	15.0p 11.8v
5. British MORI Survey, 1994	Carrado et al., 1996		
6. British Crime Survey, 1996	Mirrlees-Black, 1999:TA.5.4	2.0(i) 4.0(c)	3.0(i) 10.0(c)
7.1 Canada, Calgary Survey, 1981	Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1988		
8. Canada, Edmonton Survey, 1983/84	Bland & Orn, 1986		
9. New Zealand, Dunedin Survey, 1972/73	Magdol et al., 1997		

Definitions: F to M = Female to Male physical injuries;

M to F = Male to Female physical injuries;

p = respondent is perpetrator; v = respondent is victim;

i = intermittent victim; c = chronic victim

* percentage of those injured who sought or were reported to have sought medical treatment.

3.9 Frequency of Acts of Physical Violence

Six of the nine surveys assessed the frequency of acts of physical violence on respondents; the three US surveys and the British Crime Survey provide means and medians which are comparable in terms of total physical violence (see Table 3.8), serious physical violence (see Table 3.9) and minor physical violence (see Table 3.10).

Table 3.8 Frequency of Total Physical Violence In Representative Samples of Men and Women

Data Source Country Year	Authors & Year	Number of Assaults	Total Physical Violence			
			Last Year		Life-Time	
			F to M	M to F	F to M	M to F
1. US National Family Violence Survey, 1975/76	Straus , Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980; Gelles, 1987:T2:39	Mean	10.1	8.8		
		Median	3.0	2.5		
2.1 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Straus & Gelles, 1988; Gelles, 1997:T4.1:76	Mean	6.1	5.4		
		Median	2.5	1.5		
2.3 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Straus, 1993:76	Mean	6.0p	7.2v		
2.4 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Stets & Straus, 1989: Cohabiting					
2.5 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Stets & Straus, 1989: Married					
3. US National Survey of Families & Households, 1987-88	Brush, 1990					
4.1 US National Youth Survey, 1983	Morse, 1995	Mean	6.1	4.8		
4.2 US National Youth Survey, 1986	Morse, 1995	Mean	7.9	5.1		
4.3 US National Youth Survey, 1989	Morse, 1995	Mean	6.4	3.7		
4.4 US National Youth Survey, 1992	Morse, 1995	Mean	6.3	3.6		
4. US National Survey of Families & Households, 1987-88	Brush, 1990					
5. British MORI Survey, 1994	Carrado et al., 1996*	% pop.chronic assaults	2.8v	1.6v	4.5v	4.8v
6. British Crime Survey, 1996	Mirrlees-Black, 1999:T.A.3.6 & p21	% pop.chronic assaults	1.5(c)	2.0(c)	5.0(c)	12.1(c)
		Mean	5.0v	5.2v		
7.1 Canada, Calgary Survey, 1981	Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1988:T2					
8. Canada, Edmonton Survey, 1983/84	Bland & Orn, 1986:Table II*	% pop. chronic assaults *	37.4p (51.0p) §	42.3p (73.3p) §		
9. New Zealand, Dunedin Survey, 1972/73	Magdol et al., 1997:T 1&2					

Definitions: F to M = Female to Male physical violence; M to F = Male to Female physical violence;

p = respondent is perpetrator; v = respondent is victim; i = intermittent victim; c = chronic victim.

* Data under heading 'Last Year' relates to any time in current relationship

§ The numbers in brackets are based on the subsample of respondents who have either been victims or perpetrators of domestic violence. The numbers in the same cells without brackets are based on the total sample of respondents in order to derive a true prevalence rate.

* Hit or threw things on more than one occasion.

Table 3.9 Frequency of Severe Physical Violence In Representative Samples of Men and Women

Data Source Country Year	Authors & Year	Number of Assaults	Severe Physical Violence	
			Last Year	
			F to M	M to F
1. US National Family Violence Survey, 1975/76	Straus , Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980; Gelles, 1987:T2:39	Mean	8.9	8.0
		Median	3.0	2.4
2.1 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Straus & Gelles, 1988; Gelles, 1997:T4.1:76	Mean	5.4	5.2
		Median	1.5	1.5
2.3 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Straus, 1993:76	Mean	4.3p	6.1v
2.4 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Stets & Straus, 1989:Cohabiting			
2.5 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Stets & Straus, 1989: Married			
3. US National Survey of Families & Households, 1987-88	Brush, 1990			
4.1 US National Youth Survey, 1983	Morse, 1995	Mean	3.8	2.5
4.2 US National Youth Survey, 1986	Morse, 1995	Mean	4.9	2.9
4.3 US National Youth Survey, 1989	Morse, 1995	Mean	3.6	1.7
4.4 US National Youth Survey, 1992	Morse, 1995	Mean	4.5	2.1
5. British MORI Survey, 1994	Carrado et al., 1996*			
6. British Crime Survey, 1996	Mirrlees-Black, 1999:			
7.1 Canada, Calgary Survey, 1981	Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1988:T1	% pop.chronic assaults (Item N)§	2.7p	1.1p
8. Canada, Edmonton Survey, 1983/84	Bland & Orn, 1986:Table II*			
9. New Zealand, Dunedin Survey, 1972/73	Magdol et al., 1997:T 1&2			

Definitions: F to M = Female to Male physical violence; M to F = Male to Female physical violence;
p = respondent is perpetrator; v = respondent is victim.

* Data under heading 'Last Year' relates to any time in current relationship

§ twice or more last year

Table 3.10 Frequency of Minor Physical Violence In Representative Samples of Men and Women

Data Source Country Year	Authors & Year	Number of Assaults	Minor Physical Violence	
			Last Year	
			F to M	M to F
1. US National Family Violence Survey, 1975/76	Straus , Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980; Gelles, 1987:T2:39			
2.1 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Straus & Gelles, 1988; Gelles, 1997:T4.1:76			
2.3 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Straus, 1993:76			
2.4 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Stets & Straus, 1989:Cohabiting			
2.5 US National Family Violence Re-Survey, 1985	Stets & Straus, 1989: Married			
3. US National Survey of Families & Households, 1987-88	Brush, 1990			
4.1 US National Youth Survey, 1983	Morse, 1995	Mean	4.4	3.7
4.2 US National Youth Survey, 1986	Morse, 1995	Mean	5.3	3.6
4.3 US National Youth Survey, 1989	Morse, 1995	Mean	4.7	2.9
4.4 US National Youth Survey, 1992	Morse, 1995	Mean	4.3	2.6
5. British MORI Survey, 1994*	Carrado et al., 1996			
6. British Crime Survey, 1996	Mirrlees-Black, 1999:T.A.3.1			
7.1 Canada, Calgary Survey, 1981	Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1988:T2	% pop.chronic assaults (Item M)§	2.6p	1.8p
8. Canada, Edmonton Survey, 1983/84	Bland & Orn, 1986:Table II			
9. New Zealand, Dunedin Survey, 1972/73	Magdol et al., 1997:T 1&2			

Definitions: F to M = Female to Male physical violence; M to F = Male to Female physical violence; p = respondent is perpetrator; v = respondent is victim.

§ twice or more last year.

As regards the frequency of total physical violence, all the US studies and the two UK surveys show that women are generally more frequently physically violent than men. However one of the US surveys is somewhat inconclusive if the frequencies are based on women’s self-report only. In a reanalysis of the National Family Violence 1985 Survey by Straus using data obtained from female respondents only, females claim they suffer more violent incidents, both overall acts and severe acts per year than they inflict. “At the same time, the fact that the average number of assaults by husbands is higher should not obscure the fact that the violent

wives carried out an average of six minor and five severe assaults per year, indicated a repetitive pattern by wives as well as husbands⁴⁷.

As regards the frequency of both severe and minor physical violence, the results are much clearer and show that women's violence is significantly more frequent than men's (Table 3.9 and 3.10). In the Calgary study in Canada, for example, Brinkerhoff and Lupri analysed data for each of the CTS acts perpetrated by men and women, but in Table 3.9 (frequency of severe physically violent acts), only rates for "kicked, bit or hit" are shown, and similarly in Table 3.10 (frequency of minor physically violent acts) only rates for "slapped" are shown. Overall, Brinkerhoff and Lupri claim that "the reported rates of violent acts by women against their partners exceed the rates reported by men"⁴⁸.

Generally therefore, and notwithstanding some inconsistent results, the three major studies in the US, the two in the UK and the one in Calgary, Canada indicate that, within the general population, women tend to be violent more frequently than men, whether measured in terms of minor and severe violence or in terms of women's self-report or men's self-report. Of course, as we have already seen, women who are chronic victims of repeated male violence suffer far more than chronic male victims.

3.10 Conclusion

The consensus emerging from the major studies of domestic violence reviewed here is that, although there are variations both within populations and cross-culturally, in English-speaking developed countries such as the US, the UK, Canada and New Zealand, domestic violence probably occurs in about 10% to 20% of all heterosexual relationships - with considerably higher prevalence rates for younger cohabiting couples - and tends to be severe in about a third of all cases. These findings are based on self-reports of victimisation and perpetration by men and women – which is the only effective way of ascertaining the true prevalence of domestic violence – even though there is conclusive evidence that both men and women over-report their victimisation and under-report their perpetration and somewhat less conclusive evidence that men may do this more than women. Even when we take these considerations into account, the results of representative studies are fairly consistent in showing that, in approximately half of all intimate relationships where domestic violence occurs, both partners use violent acts, with the remainder divided equally between male-only violence and female-

⁴⁷ Straus, 1993:76.

⁴⁸ Brinkerhoff & Lupri:1988:418.

only violence. As a result, the self-reported prevalence of domestic violence among men and women, both as victims and as perpetrators, is broadly similar for all types of violence, both psychological and physical, minor and severe.

However it needs to be emphasised that the outcomes of domestic violence in terms of physical and psychological injuries tends to be considerably more negative for women than for men. At the same time, it also needs to be emphasised that women are not the only victims and the existing consensus does not fully reflect the reality of violence between men and women in intimate relationships. The converse of these findings also needs to be emphasised: the vast majority of men and women are not violent to each other in intimate relationships.

These findings are difficult to reconcile with the fact that women are far more likely than men to present as victims of domestic violence to the accident and emergency departments of hospitals, to refuges for abused women, to police stations, and treatment clinics. Other researchers such as Magdol and colleagues have noted this tension between community-based surveys using representative samples of the population (such as those which form the basis of this chapter) and clinic-based surveys using self-selected populations: “Community studies have consistently reported that more women than men are physically violent toward a partner. Clinical studies have consistently implied that more men than women are physically violent towards a partner”⁴⁹.

In trying to address the tension between these two findings it is important not to dismiss either of them as insignificant. In order to build a bridge of understanding between the two results it is important to bear four factors in mind. First, the most deviant forms of domestic violence – whether of men against women or vice versa – may not be included in representative surveys of the type reviewed here. In other words, there may be extreme forms of domestic violence against women which cannot be captured in these surveys and which would account for their higher representation in clinic-based studies. Second, notwithstanding the higher level of physical and psychological violence of women against men, the surveys reviewed here also show that physically violent men inflict far more injuries and threats of violence on women than vice versa. That would help to explain the greater use of services by women victims of domestic violence. Third, male victims of domestic violence may face much greater barriers to services than female victims because of a widespread cultural belief that “no man would ever allow himself to be abused by a women” and conversely, “no woman would ever perpetrate abuse on a man”. Fourth, there is a much greater range of services for female

victims of domestic violence than for male victims and, from a statistical point of view, this allows domestic violence against women to become more visible. By contrast, there are virtually no services for male victims of domestic violence and this may be conducive to drawing the erroneous conclusion that there are no male victims either.

These considerations are not designed to provide an exhaustive explanation of why the results of statistically reliable surveys of domestic violence are so at variance with the results of self-selected samples of people who use services for the victims of domestic violence or who report domestic violence to the police. However they do suggest that these findings can no longer be ignored and that domestic violence is an issue which affects men as much as women, both as victims as well as perpetrators.

⁴⁹ Magdol et al., 1997:76.

Chapter Four

What Are The Factors Associated With Domestic Violence?

“The experience of family living is the single greatest influence on an individual’s life”
Commission on the Family, 1996:13.

4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines some of the factors which research has found to be associated with domestic violence and draws upon some of the prevailing paradigms that have been used to explain it. In order to make the research findings as accessible and useful as possible we have organised the chapter into five main sections covering the factors associated with mutual violence between men and women (section 4.2), as well as the individual characteristics of male perpetrators (section 4.3), male victims (section 4.4), female perpetrators (section 4.5) and female victims (section 4.6). In order to capture the scope of research in this field we present the findings in each section under the following headings: age, marital and parenting status, socio-economic status, family of origin, and psychological / pathological correlates. As we shall see, not all of the research findings are in agreement with each other although some common factors emerge consistently and it is these which are most useful in helping to clarify the known factors associated with domestic violence.

4.2 Mutual Abuse

We know from our review in Chapter Three that much domestic violence is mutual. With few exceptions, mutual violence is significantly more likely than either domestic violence by men only against women or by women only against men (see Tables 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.5 above). The research findings indicate that between a third and a half of all domestic violence involves mutual abuse. For example data from the 1985 US National Family Violence Resurvey show that “of the 825 respondents who experienced one or more assaults, both parties engaged in violence in 49% of the cases. ... These results are similar to those found in the first National Family Violence Survey (Straus, 1980)”¹. Similar results were found in the 1981 study in Calgary, Canada². Other surveys report similar or higher findings; for example a survey of couples seeking marital therapy found that “86% of aggression reported by the couples in this

¹ Stets & Straus, 1990a:154.

² Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1988:426.

sample was reciprocal”³. Indeed one study based on a sample of dating students found that victimisation was the largest predictor of perpetration for both men and women⁴.

The reality of mutual domestic violence is itself likely to be highly diverse and three variants may be noted. First, it is highly likely that there are cases whereby the mutual violence is almost exclusively male with the woman retaliating in self-defence on an infrequent basis; in these instances, the woman’s assaults are likely to be more minor and justifiably self-defensive in the context of the violence being inflicted upon her. Second, there are couples where the violence is much more of what might be termed ‘mutual combat’ with both partners using similar acts and initiating as much as responding and usually using only minor assaults. Third, in still other couples there is likely to be much greater use of assaults by women with the male partner responding infrequently and perhaps less severely. It is clear therefore that mutual domestic violence is a rather heterogeneous category and this needs to be borne in mind in this section.

4.2.1 Age

One of the more robust findings to emerge from a number of different research studies is that mutual violence is considerably higher among younger couples than older couples. For example, the MORI study in the UK found that “the reported incidence of either sustained or inflicted victimisation was highest for the youngest age group and decreased with age”⁵. In the first US National Family Violence Survey (1975-76) which used marital or cohabiting couples as its sample, it was found that violence was most prevalent in younger families, particularly those under 30⁶. The Calgary Survey found that mutual violence “is pronounced particularly among younger couples and among those married less than eight years”⁷. These findings have led one group of researchers to suggest that “the origin of spouse abuse and a concomitant weakening of marital bonds appear to be rooted in the formative stages of marriage”⁸. Straus and his colleagues (1980) give four possible explanations for the higher level of abuse among young couples: (1) that younger people are more violence prone; (2) that younger marriages involve two people learning to live with one another, going through frequent and often drastic changes; (3) that younger marriages are more likely to break up;

³ Cascardi, Langhinrichsen & Vivian, 1992:1183.

⁴ Bookwala, Frieze, Smith & Ryan, 1992.

⁵ Carrado et al., 1996:408.

⁶ Straus et al., 1980:143; see also Stets & Henderson, 1991; Cascardi, Langhinrichsen & Vivian, 1992.

⁷ Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1988:429.

⁸ O’Leary, Barling, Arias, Rosenbaum, Malone & Tyree, 1989.

and (4) that violence in the family is increasing⁹. As it turns out, the latter cause appears to have been disproven by the second US National Family Violence Resurvey (1985) which showed that prevalence rates were remarkably similar to the first US National Family Violence Survey (1975-76). However other researchers have analysed data from the two American National Family Violence Surveys and were unable to explain the association between age and marital violence¹⁰. The only qualification to the strong association between youth and mutual domestic violence is that couples in retirement also show relatively high rates of aggression towards each other. For example, the Calgary Survey did a separate analysis of older couples and found that couples in the retirement stage had a considerably higher incidence rate than couples in the pre-retirement stage. Thus “there is some evidence that age and interspousal violence are curvilinear”¹¹. Similarly results from the British Crime Survey found that, “although risks of partner assault decrease with age for both men and women, they do not disappear - around 1% of the over 45s had been assaulted by a partner in the last year”¹². However the overall weight of evidence suggests that mutual violence is much more likely among younger men and women.

4.2.2 Marital and Parenting Status

As the term is normally used, the marital status of a person may be single, married, cohabiting, separated, divorced or widowed. One of the consistently robust findings about mutual domestic violence is that it tends to be highest among cohabiting couples and lowest among married couples with dating and divorced couples holding an intermediate position between these two extremes. In the Calgary study, it was found that cohabiting couples had double the violence rate of those who were married¹³. Similarly the 1985 US National Family Violence Resurvey found that cohabiting couples had the highest assault rate overall and well ahead of married and dating couples¹⁴. This study also found that the severity of violence was greatest among cohabiting couples: “Not only are cohabiting couples at greatest risk for violence, but in addition the most dangerous forms of violence occur when individuals cohabit. This is true because severe violence that is carried out by both partners is most common in cohabiting relationships”¹⁵. Although few of the surveys under review included data on divorced and separated persons, other research has found that this group has a relatively high rate of mutual

⁹ Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980:143.

¹⁰ Suitor, Pillemer & Straus, 1990:316.

¹¹ Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1988:429.

¹² Mirrlees-Black, 1999:28.

¹³ Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1988; see also Lane & Gwartney-Gibbs, 1985.

¹⁴ Stets & Straus, 1990b:241; see also Yllo & Straus, 1981.

¹⁵ Stets & Straus 1990b:235.

domestic violence¹⁶. One explanation offered for the high risk of domestic violence among cohabiters is that “cohabiting couples may be more likely to be isolated from their network of kin than dating and married couples ... which might help to monitor violent behaviour”¹⁷. Others have suggested that the issue of control may be particularly important for cohabiting couples: The issue of control may not be as problematic among dating and married couples as it is among cohabiting couples ... but as dating relationships become more serious, control may take more precedence and violence may become more frequent¹⁸. Yet others have suggested the constraining influence of marriage itself as an explanatory factor: “cohabiting couples may be more violent than married couples because they tend to share certain features that give rise to conflict, but they may lack some features of marriage that serve to constrain the conflict from escalating into physical assaults”¹⁹. Unlike marital status, the association between parenting status and domestic violence is much less straightforward and the results of research are somewhat inconsistent. In the Calgary study for example, childless couples had a higher incidence of domestic violence than couples with children although the authors suggest that this may be “more a function of age and length of marriage than of being a parent”²⁰. By contrast, the first US National Family Violence Survey (1975-76) found that “spouse abuse was low for men and women with no children, increased with each additional child up to six and was non-existent in homes with six or more children”²¹. The British Crime Survey came up with a similar result “perhaps suggesting children sometimes increase pressures in relationships”²².

One review of the literature proposed the following synthesis of the link between marital and parenting status: “The myth that ‘all married couples are at equal risk for violence’ has been replaced by data showing that partner violence is concentrated among unmarried young men and women who cohabit and bear children at a young age, especially young men and women who have a developmental history of conduct problems Rates of partner violence double among young couples who move from dating into cohabiting and who bear children at a young age. And so aggressive behaviour becomes highly stable across the life course of individuals and is transmitted from generation to generation within families”²³.

¹⁶ Nisonoff & Bitman, 1979.

¹⁷ Stets & Straus, 1990b:241-2.

¹⁸ See Hotaling & Straus, 1980; Arias et al., 1987; Stets & Pirog-Good, 1987.

¹⁹ Moffitt & Caspi, 1998:142.

²⁰ Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1988:426.

²¹ Straus et al., 1980:179.

²² Mirrlees-Black, 1999:32.

²³ Moffitt & Caspi, 1998:142.

4.2.3 Socio-economic Status

The main research findings suggest that mutual domestic violence is more prevalent among lower socio-economic groups. Both of the US National Family Violence Surveys came up with this result²⁴. The British Crime Survey also found a strong association between mutual domestic violence and households experiencing financial difficulties: 10% of women and 12% of men living in these households had been assaulted in the previous year²⁵. The British MORI survey also found that perpetration was higher (though only slightly) in lower socio-economic groups²⁶. Other studies report similar results²⁷. These results do not imply that mutual domestic violence is confined to lower socio-economic groups; only that the prevalence rates tend to be higher. As the Calgary survey suggested “domestic violence is not limited to the lower classes”²⁸; indeed the results of a US student survey found that “students from high-income families reported more violence than others” but this was not a random sample²⁹. It seems safe to conclude therefore that domestic violence is more prevalent in lower socio-economic groups.

4.2.4 Family of Origin

We have not come across any research which specifically examined the association between mutual domestic violence and family of origin characteristics.

4.2.5 Psychological/Pathological Correlates

Power: Domestic violence is seen by many researchers as an expression of power. According to the authors of the first US National Family Violence Survey in 1975-76: “violence is used by the most powerful family member as a means of legitimising his or her dominant position ... less powerful members of the family tend to rely on violence as a reaction to their own lack of participation in the family decision making process”³⁰. In a study by Colman and Straus (1986), it was suggested that those couples who are egalitarian (29%) and make decisions together had the lowest rates of conflict and violence, whilst male-dominant (9.4%) and female-dominant (7.5%) couples had the highest rates. When couples agreed that one or other should make the decisions in the family, conflict and violence were reduced; however when

²⁴ Straus et al., 1980:Chart 10; Stets & Straus, 1990:232.

²⁵ Mirrless-Black, 1999.

²⁶ Carrado et al., 1996:408.

²⁷ Cascardi et al., 1992; Stets & Henderson, 1991.

²⁸ Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1988:426.

²⁹ Lane & Gwartney-Gibbs, 1985.

³⁰ Straus et al., 1980:193.

conflict did occur in such families, it was associated with a much higher risk of violence than a similar level of conflict in egalitarian families³¹.

Alcohol: Alcohol intoxication has been linked to spouse battering although the precise causal nature of the link is unclear³². For example, the British Crime Survey found that a third of assaults took place while the assailant was under the influence of alcohol. However the author of this study pointed out that “it is not possible to say whether alcohol caused the violence, whether it contributed to it happening, or simply reflects a correlational effect (alcohol use may be higher amongst the group most likely to commit assaults)”³³. Other researchers have also been at a loss to explain the causal connection between alcohol use and domestic violence and suggest that alcohol is better viewed as a means of gaining courage to carry out the act and /or as a convenient excuse once it has occurred³⁴. It is also worth pointing out that while alcohol plays a role in many domestic assaults, the majority take place without its ‘assistance’.

Psychopathology: The Edmonton survey in Canada found a strong connection between the perpetration of domestic violence and the presence of psychopathological characteristics³⁵. Their results, which support a pathological rather than a sociological explanation of domestic violence, revealed that “higher than expected proportions of those exhibiting violent behaviour had a psychiatric diagnosis and the rate of violent behaviours in those with diagnoses (54.4%) significantly exceeds the rate in the remainder of the sample (15.5%). Particularly high rates of violence are found in those whose alcoholism is combined with antisocial personality disorder and/or recurrent depression (80-93%). Also at high risk for violence are those who have made suicide attempts (over 50%) and those who have been arrested for non-traffic offences (65.9%)”³⁶. Another study suggested that domestic violence was related to patients with personality disorder and schizophrenia but not to depression³⁷.

4.2.6 Summary

This review suggests that mutual domestic violence is found mainly among younger couples and is strongly associated with cohabitation; relative to other relationships, marriage seems to be a protection against mutual domestic violence although this may be a residual effect created

³¹ Colman & Straus, 1986; see also O’Leary & Curley, 1986; Dutton, 1994:173.

³² Nisonoff & Bitman, 1979; Stets & Henderson, 1991; Ernst, Nick, Weiss, Houry & Mills, 1997.

³³ Mirrlees-Black, 1999:46.

³⁴ See Morley & Mulender, 1994.

³⁵ Bland & Orn, 1986.

³⁶ *ibid*:129.

³⁷ Bergman & Ericsson, 1996.

by the dissolution of violent marriages. Most of the evidence suggests that mutual domestic violence is associated with lower socio-economic status; however there seems to be no clear association between parenting status and mutual domestic violence. Mutual violence is more likely to occur in relationships which are either male-dominant or female-dominant and is least likely in egalitarian relationships. Mutual domestic violence is also associated with alcohol use and psychological disturbance. These findings provide support for a sociological understanding of mutual domestic violence (given its association with the distribution of power in relationships) as well as a pathological model of domestic violence (given its association with certain psychopathological characteristics).

4.3 Male Perpetrators

There is a substantial amount of research on male perpetrators. This is due in part to the existing consensus of domestic violence which assumes that, in the vast majority of cases, perpetrators are male. However it may also be due to the fact that the most serious physical and psychological injuries arising through domestic violence are perpetrated by men.

4.3.1 Age

Although youth seemed to predict domestic violence in the area of mutual abuse, a number of studies suggest that male perpetrators tend to be older men. For example, the Calgary survey found that men who were between 30 and 45 years old were significantly more likely to be violent than either younger or older men³⁸. This study also found perpetration among older retired men where “husband-to-wife violence exceeded wife-to-husband violence by a two-to-one margin”³⁹. The British Crime Survey also found that, “over half of domestic violence assaults against women are committed by a male aged between 30 and 59. Attackers of chronic victims had a slightly older age profile than those of intermittent victims”⁴⁰.

4.3.2 Marital and Parenting Status

The British Crime Survey found that male perpetration was highest among men who were separating or separated from their partners; this contrasts with female perpetration which is highest among women who are cohabiting with their partners⁴¹. This seems to suggest that male perpetration is more likely to occur when a relationship is breaking down (hence the

³⁸ Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1988:426.

³⁹ *ibid*:424.

⁴⁰ Mirrlees-Black, 1999:43.

⁴¹ Mirrlees-Black, 1999.

higher rate of separation among female victims) whereas female perpetration is more likely in an ongoing relationship (hence the higher rate of cohabitation among male victims). The same inference can be drawn from the results of the MORI Survey in the UK⁴². The different profile of male and female perpetrators may also reflect the “differential emotional reactions to separation on the part of men and women, with women less likely to use violence than men to express their feelings in this context”⁴³. Given that female perpetration is more likely in cohabitating relationships, the same author concludes that “women's violence against men is, therefore, more likely to be within the context of an ongoing relationship”⁴⁴. It is worth emphasising that male perpetration does not occur only in the context of separation; it occurs in all marital statuses but is more likely in the context of separation.

4.3.3 Socio-economic Status

One indicator of socio-economic status is employment and the research evidence suggests a strong association between men who are unemployed or employed part-time and the perpetration of domestic violence. The 1975-6 US National Family Violence Survey found that unemployed men were twice as likely to use severe violence on their wives as men employed full-time, and men employed part-time had a rate of wife-beating three times the rate for full-time employed men⁴⁵. The most violent husbands were those who had graduated from high school whereas the least violent were either grammar school dropouts or men with some college education⁴⁶. In some respects this finding is similar to the socio-economic profile of male perpetrators in the New Zealand study which found that severely violent men were more likely than their female counterparts to be poorly educated, chronically unemployed and to lack social network support. “On average, men who were perpetrators had three fewer social support resources than the sample as a whole”⁴⁷.

4.3.4 Family of Origin

The research evidence suggests that male perpetrators are more likely to have been abused as children and are more likely to have witnessed parental spouse abuse in their families of origin⁴⁸.

⁴² Carrado et al., 1996.

⁴³ Mirrlees-Black, 1999:30.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ Straus et al., 1980:150.

⁴⁶ *ibid*:146.

⁴⁷ Magdol et al., 1997:76.

⁴⁸ Rosenbaum & O'Leary, 1981; see also O'Leary & Curley, 1986.

4.3.5 Psychological/Pathological Correlates

Attitudes: It has been found that male perpetrators have more tolerant attitudes towards violence and verbal aggression than the population in general⁴⁹ as well as more tolerant attitudes to spouse abuse in particular⁵⁰.

Power: We have already seen that inequalities in power are associated with mutual domestic violence. This is also true of male perpetrators. The results of the first US National Family Violence Survey (1975-76) found that male perpetration tends to occur in households where “the husband is dominant in family decisions, the wife is a full-time housewife and the wife is very worried about economic security”⁵¹. However, the reverse can also be the case in that husbands who do not control decision-making, are stressed and are lacking in self-esteem, are also inclined to be abusive⁵². The common thread in these findings seems to be that inegalitarian relationships tend to be more abusive than egalitarian relationships.

Alcohol & Drug-Abuse: Many researchers regard alcohol as a significant contributory factor in male perpetration⁵³. The British Crime Survey also found that drugs were a factor in a minority of cases: “8% of female victims of chronic domestic violence said their assailant was under the influence of drugs at the time of the last assault, compared to 5% of the intermittent victims”⁵⁴.

Psychopathology: The research evidence suggests that male perpetrators are more likely to have some psychopathology compared to the average population of men. The Dunedin study in New Zealand found that “although women report more perpetration of physical violence than men, the personal characteristics of male perpetrators are the most deviant and are consistent with the profile that has emerged from clinical research on male perpetrators (Dinwiddie, 1992; Roberts, 1987)”⁵⁵. This study also found that, among perpetrators of severe physical violence, men had more extreme levels than women of clinically relevant characteristics such as polydrug abuse, antisocial personality disorder and depression⁵⁶.

⁴⁹ Bookwala, Frieze, Smith & Ryan, 1992.

⁵⁰ Russell & Hulson, 1992; Rosenbaum & O’Leary, 1981.

⁵¹ Straus et al., 1980:204.

⁵² Russell & Hulson, 1992; Rosenbaum & O’Leary, 1981.

⁵³ Russell & Hulson, 1992; Rosenbaum & O’Leary, 1981; Kaufman Kantor & Straus, 1987.

⁵⁴ Mirrlees-Black, 1999:46.

⁵⁵ Magdol et al., 1997:76.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

4.3.6 Summary

Our review of the evidence suggests that male perpetrators tend to be in the age range of 30 to 50 years, to be separated or separating from their partners, to come from lower socio-economic backgrounds and to have a relatively poor employment record. They are also likely to come from abusive family backgrounds and, perhaps related to this, to have more tolerant attitudes towards violence and aggression. Male perpetrators also tend to be either dominant or dominated in their current relationships and are much more likely than other men – or indeed female perpetrators – to show symptoms of psychopathology such as personality disorder or depression. These characteristics suggest that male perpetrators are strongly influenced by a disruptive family background and a poor relationship with their current partner and are relatively disadvantaged vis à vis other men.

4.4 Female Perpetrators

Unlike male perpetrators, there is relatively little research on female perpetrators. Again this is due, at least in part, to the existing consensus on domestic violence which assumes that, in the vast majority of cases, women only use domestic violence in self-defence which is not “perpetration” in its pure sense. However, as we have seen in Chapter Three, there is a good deal of research evidence to suggest that women perpetrate violence against men in situations that cannot be characterised as self-defence⁵⁷. There is also research evidence that women in lesbian relationships perpetrate violence against other women⁵⁸.

4.4.1 Age

A number of studies show that female perpetrators tend to be younger women, usually under 30 years old. This is the clear finding of the Calgary survey in Canada which showed that women under 30 were likely to be more violent than older women, and were nearly twice as likely to perpetrate violence against their partners than their partners were against them, (18.0% vs 9.9%)⁵⁹. Similar results have emerged from other studies⁶⁰. An important exception to these findings emerged from the British Crime Survey which found that about half of the physical assaults committed by women against male partners were committed by

⁵⁷ For example Straus et al., 1980; Stets & Straus, 1990a; Morse, 1995; Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1988; DeMaris, 1992.

⁵⁸ Dutton, 1994; Lie & Gentlewarrior, 1991; Bologna, Waterman & Dawson, 1987.

⁵⁹ Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1988:426.

⁶⁰ See for example Sommer, Barnes & Murray, 1992; Malone, Tyree & O'Leary, 1989; O'Leary et al., 1989; Stets, 1990.

those aged between 16 and 29 while the other half were committed by women aged 30 to 59, with no difference between chronic and intermittent victims⁶¹.

4.4.2 Marital and Parenting Status

Cohabitation is a factor associated with female perpetration and has a stronger influence than it has on male perpetration. According to the Calgary study in Canada⁶², cohabiting female respondents were significantly more likely to perpetrate violent acts than were married females (20.9% vs 12.7%). They were also more likely to perpetrate violent acts than cohabiting male perpetrators (20.9% vs 11.6%). The same results were reported by the British Crime Survey which found that cohabiting men (8%) were at much greater risk of victimisation by their female partners than married men (3%)⁶³.

4.4.3 Socio-economic Status

The research evidence, particularly from the two US National Family Violence Surveys, suggests that there are two main types of female perpetrator. The first is women who are blue collar and married. This is clear from the 1975 US National Family Violence Survey which found that “the most violent wives are those who did not complete high school”⁶⁴. This study also found that the characteristics which are important for husband beating included the wife being a manual worker⁶⁵. However more detailed analysis of the 1985 US National Family Violence Resurvey – which focused on the interaction between socio-economic status and marital status - found a second type of female perpetrator, namely women who are white collar and either dating or cohabiting⁶⁶. However, the latter type may have resulted from the growth in cohabitation in the ten years after the first type was identified. The Calgary study in Canada also found a sub-group of female perpetrators among higher earning educated couples and also found that “women who were employed full-time were somewhat more likely to report violence against their husbands than women who worked for pay part-time and those who were homemakers”⁶⁷. Thus female perpetration seems to be influenced by the interaction of both socio-economic status and marital status. Other studies typically offer scant information on the socio-economic characteristics of female perpetrators.

⁶¹ Mirrlees-Black, 1999:43.

⁶² Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1988:426.

⁶³ Mirrlees-Black, 1999.

⁶⁴ Straus et al., 1980:146.

⁶⁵ *ibid*:204.

⁶⁶ Stets & Straus 1990:232.

⁶⁷ Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1988:424.

4.4.4 Family of Origin

There are relatively few studies which seem to have investigated this dimension but the first US National Family Violence Survey (1975-75) offered the following profile of the female abuser: “the abusive wife was physically punished at age thirteen specifically by her father; and she also grew up in family in which mother hit father”⁶⁸. Other researchers have found that female perpetration is associated with the following variables: being a victim of physical assault in an adolescent romantic relationship; weak emotional ties; low levels of alcohol/drug use; and opportunity to aggress⁶⁹. A variety of non-random samples have found that family of origin was not a critical factor of women in abusive relationships⁷⁰ but it is doubtful if these should be given the same weight as the random sample of the US National Family Violence Survey.

4.4.5 Psychological/Pathological Correlates

Power: There is an extensive amount of research and commentary on the link between power and domestic violence. Our review of the research evidence in the previous sections suggests that domestic violence is more likely to occur in male-dominated and female-dominated relationships and is least likely to occur in egalitarian relationships. As such, domestic violence can be just as much an expression of women’s power as of men’s power. It is sometimes assumed that most female perpetration is a response to powerlessness and occurs only in the context of self-defence. However the evidence does not support this view. We have already seen in Chapter Three that women are just as likely, on their own admission, to initiate violence in the relationship as their male partner. The British MORI study found that male and female perpetrators gave broadly similar reasons for inflicting violence on their partner⁷¹. In fact the most frequently cited reason for perpetration was that this was the “only way to get through to” their partners (53% of women gave this as the reason compared to 64% of men). According to the authors: “Even at the potentially most serious level of assault only one woman in three identified self-defence or retaliation as a reason for their assault”⁷². Similarly Gonzalez (1997) asked women students why they assaulted their male partners and the most common reason given was a spontaneous reaction to frustration. In a dating sample, male victims thought female aggressors wanted to show how angry they were and wanted to retaliate for feeling emotionally hurt or mistreated; female perpetrators agreed but said they

⁶⁸ Straus et al., 1980:204.

⁶⁹ White & Humphrey, 1994.

⁷⁰ O’Leary & Curley, 1986.

⁷¹ Carrado et al., 1996, Table 5.

wanted to get control too. Male perpetrators cited jealousy more often than female perpetrators⁷³.

Psychopathology: The research reviewed earlier in this chapter suggests that male perpetrators may have more pronounced pathological characteristics than female perpetrators. However, the results of a Canadian survey found that female perpetrators tend to be young women who are “highly anxious, emotional, worrisome, prone to drug and/or alcohol dependence”⁷⁴. The Edmonton survey, also in Canada, came up with a similar profile⁷⁵. These Canadian studies also found that female perpetrators can be tough-minded, uncaring, insensitive, and antisocial⁷⁶. Some studies also suggest that female perpetrators are more likely than men to use weapons in domestic violence⁷⁷.

4.4.6 Summary

The research evidence suggests that female perpetrators tend to be younger women, usually under 30. The research also suggests that there may be two different types of female perpetrator: one is a blue collar women who is married and the other is a white collar women who is cohabiting or dating. However, the latter type may have resulted from the growth in cohabitation in the ten years after the first type was identified. There is limited evidence on the family of origin of female perpetrators but one study found that they had personal experience of victimisation as young girls and may also have seen their mother hitting their father. Female perpetrators have a less psychopathological profile than male perpetrators but their reasons for inflicting violence on their partner tend to be similar and are not primarily self-defence. These findings draw attention to the importance of power in the perpetration of domestic violence and suggest that social rather than pathological factors may be the main influences on female perpetrators.

4.5 Male Victims

Male victims refer essentially to those men who suffer violence from their female partners without retaliating. Even though the evidence of research shows that there are male victims in

⁷² *ibid*:410

⁷³ Follingstad, Wright, Lloyd, & Sebastian, 1991.

⁷⁴ Sommer, Barnes & Murray, 1992:1321.

⁷⁵ Bland and Orn, 1986.

⁷⁶ Sommer, Barnes & Murray, 1992; Bland & Orn, 1986; see also Riggs, O’Leary & Breslin, 1990.

⁷⁷ for example, Roberts, O’Toole, Raphael, Lawrence & Ashby, 1996.

a substantial proportion of violent relationships, there has been relatively little research on these men.

4.5.1 Age

The main source of data on the age of male victims comes from the 1996 British Crime Survey. Most male victims, like their female counterparts, are in the 20-40 age bracket. Within that bracket, “the peak age for male-victims was 20 to 24: 9.2% said they had been assaulted in the previous year”⁷⁸.

4.5.2 Marital and Parenting Status

Male victims, like their female counterparts, are least likely to be married, and are most likely to be separated, divorced or cohabiting. That is the clear finding of both the British Crime Survey and the UK MORI Survey⁷⁹. However there is one significant difference in the marital status of male and female victims. In the British Crime Survey the highest risk category for male victims is cohabitation (7.7%) whereas the highest risk category for female victims is separation (21.6%). This seems to suggest that women remain married or cohabiting with a male that does not assault them, but who they can assault without fear that he will break up the relationship because of her assaultiveness. Male victims are more likely to stay in a violent relationship than female victims possibly because, as suggested by one group of researchers, of the “social unacceptability of males being victims of domestic assault”⁸⁰; however it may also be due to a desire to protect children from a violent mother.

4.5.3 Socio-economic Status

The results of the different studies produce a somewhat inconsistent profile of the socio-economic status of male victims. On the one hand there are studies which show that male victimisation is more likely among lower socio-economic men. For example the 1975 US National Family Violence Survey found that “men who have not completed high school are the most likely to be victims of their wives’ violence”⁸¹. Similarly the 1994 MORI Survey in the UK found that victimisation of men in lower socio-economic groups was more likely both in all relationships and current relationships than those in the higher socio-economic groups⁸². By contrast, the findings of the 1996 British Crime Survey indicate that professional and

⁷⁸ Mirrlees-Black, 1999:28.

⁷⁹ Mirrlees-Black, 1999; Carrado et al., 1996.

⁸⁰ Carrado et al., 1996:412; see also George, 1994; Harris & Cook, 1994.

⁸¹ Straus et al., 1980:146.

skilled non-manual men were more likely than any other category of men to be victimised⁸³. However it is the employment status of these men which points to their vulnerability since, according to the British Crime Survey, male victims are more likely to be working part-time, unemployed or in education. The same survey also found that disability was a factor in male victimisation: “disability and long standing illness are related to risks of victimisation, particularly for young men. Over one in ten young men with a long standing illness or disability said they had been assaulted by a partner in the previous year”⁸⁴. Thus a synthesis of these different studies might suggest that men are more likely to be victimised by their female partners when they have little economic power and bring few economic resources to the relationship.

4.5.4 Family of Origin

We have not come across any research which found an association between male victims and family of origin.

4.5.5 Psychological/Pathological Correlates

Power: The unequal distribution of power in relationships between men and women is apparent in much domestic violence. The first US National Family Violence Survey 1975-76 found that husbands are more likely to be beaten by their wives in households where one or other partner was dominant while husbands in democratic homes are the least likely to be abused⁸⁵. This is also consistent with the weak economic position of male victims and a failure to fill traditional male roles leading, according to the British Crime Survey, to a higher level of “self-blame” among male victims⁸⁶.

Psychopathology: Male victims suffer from psychological distress though, according to one study, they suffer to a lesser extent than female victims⁸⁷.

4.5.6 Summary

Male victims are more likely to be younger men who are cohabiting with their partners and, relative to other men, they have little economic power and bring few economic resources to

⁸² Carrado et al., 1996:408-9.

⁸³ Mirrlees-Black, 1999:31.

⁸⁴ *ibid*:32.

⁸⁵ Straus et al., 1980:193.

⁸⁶ Mirrlees-Black, 1999:40.

⁸⁷ Grandin, Lupri & Brinkerhoff, 1998.

the relationship. These men, perhaps because they do not fulfil their own or their partners expectations of the traditional male role, are likely to blame themselves for the violence that is inflicted on them.

4.6 Female Victims

Female victims are probably the main victims of domestic violence in that they sustain the most severe physical and psychological injuries. Although much of the pain and suffering of domestic violence is invisible and unheard, the harshest realities of domestic violence are undoubtedly evident in the injuries sustained by female victims. Understandably therefore a good deal of research attention has been given to the characteristics of female victims.

4.6.1 Age

Most female victims, like their male counterparts, are in the 16-40 age bracket. According to the British Crime Survey, the strongest concentration of victims is in the 16-24 age bracket⁸⁸. Older women can also be victims but this is less likely⁸⁹.

4.6.2 Marital and Parenting Status

There is a good deal of evidence that single and separated women are at the highest risk of victimisation by their male partners; married women are at the least risk of victimisation. This is the clear finding from the two British studies in our review but has also been found in the Edmonton survey in Canada. According to the UK MORI survey “higher percentages of single dating women reported sustaining victimisation across all relationships than married/cohabiting women”⁹⁰. It should be noted that “single” women in this context includes both those who are never married as well as those who are divorced. The British Crime Survey also found that these women are at risk although it is separated women who were at highest risk: “women who described themselves as currently separated from a partner with whom they had previously been living were by far the most likely to have been victims of domestic assault in the previous year: 22% had been assaulted at least once that year. While for some of this group separation may have followed the assault, the weight of evidence suggests many assaults occur immediately following separation”⁹¹. These findings are in line with the Edmonton survey in Canada which found that there was a relationship between

⁸⁸ Mirrlees-Black, 1999:28.

⁸⁹ See Roberts, O’Toole, Raphael, Lawrence & Ashby, 1996.

⁹⁰ Carrado et al., 1996:407.

⁹¹ Mirrless-Black, 1999:29.

women who walked out of relationships and spousal violence⁹². Thus women who leave or have left relationships are more at risk of victimisation from partners of those relationships. Although the majority of male and female victims live with their perpetrators, female victims are less likely to be living with their perpetrators than male victims⁹³. Married women are at least risk of domestic violence.

4.6.3 Socio-economic Status

There is a high degree of consensus that female victims are drawn predominantly from lower socio-economic groups. For example, the 1975 National Family Violence Survey in the US found that “women who have not completed high school are the most likely to be physically abused ... and college-educated women are the least likely to be abused by their husbands”⁹⁴. Similarly, the 1996 British Crime Survey found that “women living in households whose head of household's occupation fell into the two least skilled categories reported the highest rates of assault in the previous year”⁹⁵. This study also found that female victims, like their male counterparts, were more likely to be outside the labour force (i.e., in education or on home duties); women with a disability were also at a greater risk of violence. The same pattern emerged from the Calgary study in Canada which found that “women working full-time were less likely to be victimised by their husbands than were wives who worked part-time or did not work for pay outside the home”⁹⁶. The authors of this study go on to offer the following explanation for this pattern: “Being employed full-time makes women less dependent economically, and renders wives less vulnerable to being abused physically by their male partners. These findings are consistent with Exchange Theory, which holds that a redistribution of resources lessens the traditional imbalance between the sexes and thus affects the rate of victimisation”⁹⁷. We have already seen that the same reasoning can be applied to explain the experiences of male victims.

4.6.4 Family of Origin

We have come across relatively few studies which examine this dimension but one study found a definite correlation between an abusive family history and female victimisation⁹⁸.

⁹² Bland & Orn, 1986:135.

⁹³ Mirrlees-Black, 1999:30; Stets & Straus 1990:232.

⁹⁴ Straus et al., 1980:146.

⁹⁵ Mirrlees-Black, 1999:30-1.

⁹⁶ Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1988:426.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*

⁹⁸ Ernst, Nick, Weiss, Houry & Mills, 1997.

4.6.5 Psychological/Pathological Correlates

Power: Female victims, like their male counterparts, tend to feel powerless. In the British Crime Survey chronic female victims were less likely to blame themselves than male victims but most of them felt powerless to prevent their most recent attack with 75% saying that “there was nothing they could have done”⁹⁹. This finding is consistent with the loss of self-esteem that is known to accompany repeated verbal and physical abuse¹⁰⁰.

Alcohol & Drug-Abuse: The British Crime Survey found that female victims (15%) were more likely than male victims (11%) to have used at least one illegal drug in the last year¹⁰¹. Moreover women who used at least one illegal drug in the last year were also much more likely to have been victimised than non-drug using women (3%).

Psychopathology: Not surprisingly, female victims show signs of serious psychological distress and one study found that female victims report “higher mean rates of psychological distress than male victims”¹⁰².

4.6.6 Summary

Female victims, like their male counterparts, tend to be under 40 years old with the strongest concentration in the 16-24 age bracket. Women who are single, divorced, separating or separated are at the highest risk of victimisation and there is evidence to suggest that leaving a relationship places women at risk of violence from the male partner of that relationship. The majority of victims live with their perpetrators but women victims are less likely to be living with their perpetrators than men. Married women are at least risk of domestic violence although this may be the outcome of women leaving violent marriages. Female victims tend to be drawn from lower socio-economic groups and, like male victims, they tend to be outside the labour market or occupy a weak position within it. They typically feel powerless to do anything to stop the violence which is inflicted upon them.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed a fairly extensive literature to find out what is known about the correlates of domestic violence. Although not exhaustive, our review covers some of the main

⁹⁹ Mirrlees-Black, 1999:41.

¹⁰⁰ Jasinski & Williams, 1997.

¹⁰¹ Mirrlees-Black, 1999:32.

studies in this area and is broadly indicative of what is known about the factors associated with domestic violence. We now summarise our findings by presenting a brief profile of the five aspects of domestic violence which we have identified, namely mutual violence (where men and women are violent to each other), male perpetrators, female perpetrators, male victims and female victims.

Mutual domestic violence is found mainly among younger couples and is strongly associated with cohabitation; relative to other relationships, marriage seems to offer a protection against domestic violence. Most of the evidence suggests that mutual domestic violence is associated with lower socio-economic status; however there seems to be no clear association between parenting status and mutual domestic violence. Mutual violence is more likely to occur in relationships which are either male-dominant or female-dominant and is least likely in egalitarian relationships. Mutual domestic violence is also associated with alcohol use and psychological disturbance. These findings provide support for a sociological understanding of mutual domestic violence (given its association with the distribution of power in relationships) as well as a pathological model of domestic violence (given its association with certain psychopathological characteristics).

Male perpetrators tend to be in the age range of 30 to 50 years, to be separated or separating from their partners, to come from lower socio-economic backgrounds and to have a relatively poor employment record. They are also likely to come from abusive family backgrounds and, perhaps related to this, tend to have more tolerant attitudes towards violence and aggression. Male perpetrators also tend to be either dominant or dominated in their current relationships and, in the light of research to date, seem more likely than other men – or indeed female perpetrators - to show symptoms of psychopathology such as personality disorder or depression. These characteristics suggest that male perpetrators are strongly influenced by a disruptive family background and a poor relationship with their current partner and are relatively disadvantaged vis à vis other men.

Female perpetrators tend to be younger women, usually under 30. The research also suggests that there may be two different types of female perpetrator: one is a blue collar women who is married and the other is a white collar women who is cohabiting or dating. There is limited evidence on the family of origin of female perpetrators but one study found that they had personal experience of victimisation as young girls and may also have seen their mother hitting their father. Female perpetrators tend to have a less psychopathological profile than

¹⁰² Grandin, Lupri & Brinkerhoff, 1998:43.

male perpetrators but their reasons for inflicting violence on their partner tend to be similar and are not primarily aimed at self-defence. These findings draw attention to the importance of power in the perpetration of domestic violence and suggest that social rather than pathological factors are the main influences on female perpetrators.

Male victims are more likely to be younger men who are cohabiting with their partners and, relative to other men, they have little economic power and bring few economic resources to the relationship. These men, perhaps because they do not fulfil their own or their partners' expectations of the traditional male role, are likely to blame themselves for the violence that is inflicted on them.

Female victims, like their male counterparts, tend to be under 40 years old with the strongest concentration in the 16-24 age bracket. Women who are single, divorced or separated are at the highest risk of victimisation and there is evidence to suggest that leaving a relationship places women at risk of violence from their male partner. Married women are at least risk of domestic violence although this may be the residual effect of female victims leaving violent marriages. Female victims tend to be drawn from lower socio-economic groups and, like male victims, they tend to be outside the labour market or occupy a weak position within it. They typically feel powerless to do anything to stop the violence which is inflicted upon them.

It will be clear from the different profiles of domestic violence presented in this chapter that power is a common thread in all of them. Relationships in which one partner is dominant – sometimes the man, sometimes the woman – are at higher risk of domestic violence than more democratic, egalitarian relationships. Power can have a personality dimension but it almost invariably has an economic dimension and male and female victims are usually in a weak economic position within that relationship. The extent of powerlessness experienced through domestic violence can be seen in the fact that female victims typically feel that there is nothing they can do to stop it while male victims often blame themselves for the violence inflicted upon them. Both men and women can be trapped in a violent relationship but men seem more unwilling than women to leave violent relationships although women place themselves at higher risk of domestic violence by trying to leave. Abusive family backgrounds are a factor in the perpetration of domestic violence, particularly in the case of male perpetrators who also seem to exhibit more psychopathological characteristics than their female counterparts. Domestic violence is associated with lower socio-economic status but of course it can be found in all social classes and tends to be confined to a minority within every social class. These findings suggest that no one theory or paradigm can properly explain domestic violence.

However there is sufficient evidence to suggest that domestic violence is essentially a learned behaviour and therein lies the hope that what is learned can be unlearned. In that context we now turn to the issue of services.

Chapter Five

What Services are Needed to Address Domestic Violence Against Men?

“Hatred never ceases by hatred but by love alone is healed. This is an ancient and eternal law”.
Bhudda (563-483 BC)

5.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the services that are needed to address the problem of domestic violence against men. This was not an easy chapter to write because there is very little literature on the topic of services for men – at least men as victims rather than men as perpetrators. This reflects the fact that there are almost no services for the male victims of domestic violence, even in countries where the statistical evidence provides prime facie evidence that there is considerable domestic violence against men. The lack of services for the male victims of domestic violence is reinforced by the reluctance of male victims to present themselves as needing services which, in turn, is often used to suggest that there is no demand for such services. It is necessary therefore to begin by reflecting on the mutually reinforcing process by which lack of services and reluctance to seek services make it difficult to find evidence of demand for services and we discuss this in section 5.2. These reflections lead us to the view that services for men can only be developed if there is a much greater public awareness among the population generally, as well as among professional service providers in particular, that domestic violence against men is a reality just like domestic violence against women (section 5.3). Some of the services that have been developed for men, albeit in a rather piecemeal and under-funded manner, include help-lines, group supports, refuges, counselling and we briefly examine these in sections 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, and 5.7 respectively. We also review how domestic violence is treated in the legal system, particularly from the perspective of men (section 5.8). The logic of acknowledging that there are male victims of domestic violence is that there are also female perpetrators and we briefly comment on their service needs (section 5.9).

5.2 Demand for Services

The reality of domestic violence is that it is a private, hidden and often shameful form of suffering that few ever hear about other than the men, women and children who are immediately involved. The stigma of being involved in a violent relationship and the fear of

even more negative consequences if others knew about it lead victims and perpetrators to conspire in keeping a lid of secrecy on the violence in their relationship so that women as well as men are reluctant to present for services until their situation becomes intolerable.

The 1996 British Crime Survey found that most victims of domestic violence did not report the matter to the authorities, whether to the police or to medical practitioners¹. However men are significantly less likely to report than women. The British Crime Survey found that, among chronic victims of domestic violence, 60% of women told a friend or relative (compared to only 29% of men), 22% of women informed the police (compared to only 8% of men) and 20% of women saw a doctor or went to hospital (compared to only 3% of men). Other research in the UK has suggested that while male and female victims experience their plight as shameful and humiliating, men face the additional fear of being ridiculed as ‘wimps’ for being victimised by a woman².

These realities help to explain the anomaly that so few men report themselves as victims to services even though they are willing to report similar levels of victimisation as women in the confidential gender-neutral surveys that we reviewed in Chapter Three. Even allowing for the fact that men seem to suffer less negative outcomes of domestic violence than women, particularly in terms of physical injuries, these differences are scarcely sufficient to account for the major disparity between the number of men and women who present for services. However this should also be seen in the context that men systematically under-report their health needs by comparison with women³ and are much less likely to use medical services such as GPs than women⁴.

It is helpful to recall the difficulties which women victims experience when presenting for services since these probably apply equally to men. “When women seek help they often do so in a tentative and ambivalent manner, filtered through shame, self-blame, a sense of failure, concerns about exposing the private problems of their families, fear associated with men's threats if contact is made and concern about the nature of the response they might receive”⁵. Likewise the experiences of Irish women in accessing services seem remarkably similar to that which we know about the problems being encountered by male victims. According to the Task Force on Violence Against Women: “women face a variety of psychological and

¹ Mirrlees-Black, 1999:80.

² Stitt & Macklin, 1995.

³ Armstrong, 1999.

⁴ Office for National Statistics, 1998

⁵ Dobash & Dobash, 1979 cited in Dobash & Dobash, 1992:232.

physical barriers to deal with violence in relationships. Many women also feel that existing services are incapable of responding to their needs”⁶.

It is doubtful if most male victims would prefer to ‘suffer in silence’ but it is possible that many are afraid to bring their victimisation to anyone’s attention for fear of not being believed, the matter going to court and their children being taken away or left with the ‘abusive’ wife⁷. Whatever the reasons, the findings of the British Crime Survey indicate that “male victims are less likely to admit, for reasons of shame, embarrassment, or machismo, the true seriousness of outcomes of assaults by women”⁸. Thus the lack of demand for services by the male victims of domestic violence is less a reflection of the real needs of these victims and more a reflection on the difficulty of expressing those needs in a way which does not risk making the matter worse.

There is some evidence that the difficulties which male victims of domestic violence encounter in presenting for services are now being recognised. In March 2000 the Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Mary Wallace TD, observed that “there can be particular difficulties for men in reporting incidents of domestic violence and in the way that elements of society deals with such reports”⁹.

5.3 Raising Public Awareness

It is well recognised that one of the ways of addressing the problem of domestic violence against women is to raise public awareness that the problem exists. This makes it easier for victims to acknowledge that they have a problem which needs help and creates greater awareness among service providers and society in general about domestic violence. In addition, as leading researchers on marital therapy in the US have pointed out, “reductions in the incidence of marital violence will occur only as we are able to raise generations of non-violent people through education and social change”¹⁰. The experience of Sweden suggests that this is indeed possible¹¹.

In Ireland the importance of public awareness is generally appreciated. For example, the Task Force on Violence Against Women (1997) gave great importance to public awareness in its

⁶ Task Force on Violence Against Women, 1997:11.

⁷ Steinmetz, 1977-78.

⁸ Mirrlees-Black, 1999:62.

⁹ Wallace, 2000.

¹⁰ Margolin & Burman, 1993:70.

¹¹ Durrant, 1999.

strategy and recommended “a publicly funded public awareness campaign, including TV/radio/poster ... and information leaflets”¹². A similar emphasis has been placed on public awareness in Northern Ireland¹³.

A major problem facing the male victims of domestic violence is that public awareness is very heavily influenced by the existing consensus on this issue – that women are the only victims and men are the only perpetrators. Public awareness campaigns which focus only on women as victims may exacerbate the problems of male victims because it effectively denies the reality of their experience and contributes to the mutually reinforcing process that men do not present for services while services, in turn, do not develop to respond to men’s needs. One group of commentators has described this situation as the “unintended negative consequences to well-intended social policies”¹⁴. There can be no denying or minimising the appalling reality of domestic violence against women but presenting this as the only reality – as for example in UNICEF’s report on “Domestic Violence against Women and Girls”¹⁵ or an EU-based report entitled “Unveiling the Hidden Data on Domestic Violence in the European Union”¹⁶ – is not helpful to the plight of male victims and is not consistent with the reality of domestic violence, at least in English-speaking developed countries. As the Canadian research team, who carried out the Calgary study which we discussed in Chapter Three, wrote: “It appears that a significant amount of education is needed to dispel the myth that males cannot be seriously abused by females. Work on this myth would help couples more effectively deal with the destructive patterns in their relationship, help prevent violence in the first place, and reduce the tendency of helping professionals to deny this problem. Moral consistency, in this case a willingness to confront couple violence with its negative psychological consequences, would seem to speak most powerfully to the needs of both female and male victims”¹⁷.

Public awareness can also help to change professional attitudes to domestic violence against men. Like the general public, professional attitudes can vary enormously on this issue: some professionals “know” the problem does not exist because they have never encountered it while others “know” it does exist because they have. Thus perceptions shape the way in which professionals engage with the problem. As one researcher has observed: “The fact is that a larger proportion of the social agencies that deal with family violence target only female

¹² Task Force on Violence Against Women, 1997:11-19.

¹³ Cited in Adams, C, 1999.

¹⁴ Gelles & Loseke, 1993:xiv.

¹⁵ UNICEF, 2000.

¹⁶ European Women’s Lobby, 1999.

victims. Thus we should not be surprised if these groups do not find evidence of male victims of domestic violence”¹⁸.

The reality as experienced by male victims of domestic violence is that professionals tend to be generally unhelpful. This finding emerged from the 1996 British Crime Survey which discovered that male victims were “particularly unhappy about the level of support offered by agencies, especially by the police”¹⁹. In explanation, the author of this survey suggested that “support agencies have a particular problem in recognising that male victims can be just as in need of support and advice as female victims”²⁰. Other researchers and commentators have found that professional people who come into contact with male victims of domestic violence either refuse to believe them or are ill-prepared to offer advice²¹. Again this needs to be seen in the context that a large range of social services tend to “filter out” men and fathers²².

These considerations suggest that raising awareness of the true scope and reality of domestic violence would be an important part of any strategy in addressing domestic violence against men. Of course we have no hard data about the situation in Ireland but, if it is similar to the other English-speaking developed countries reviewed here, then it is likely that domestic violence against men is a significant if unacknowledged reality. Again, it is noteworthy that this possibility has been officially acknowledged by the Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform who has stated that the National Steering Committee on Violence against Women, which was established in 1997, is not “blind to, or in any way against the plight of male victims of domestic violence ... or against progress in relation to the provision of services for male victims”²³.

5.4 Help Lines

Help lines have become an enormously popular aspect of all services, not only in social services but in the commercial world as well. For the victims of domestic violence they offer immediacy, confidentiality and information which are particularly crucial when situations reach a point of crisis. For service providers they can be a source of referral and a gateway to

¹⁷ Grandin, Lupri & Brinkerhoff, 1998.

¹⁸ George, 1994:150.

¹⁹ Mirrlees-Black, 1999:63.

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ Adams, 1999; Farrell, 1993; McHugh, Walsh & McCafferky, 1999; Stitt & Macklin, 1995; Macchietto, 1992; Harris & Cook, 1994.

²² See Buckley, 1998; McKeown, Ferguson & Rooney, 1998, Ch 7.

²³ Wallace, 2000.

their services. For policy makers, they can give an indication of the level of need which exists for that service.

As in other areas of domestic violence, help line services are much more developed for women than men. In Ireland, a help line service for male victims is run by AMEN, a voluntary organisation established in 1997. In the three years to 2000, AMEN was contacted by over 6,000 men and concerned members of their families. In the UK, there is a modest help line service based in London, called MALE, and staffed by one person. It was established in 1994 as an adjunct to Merton Refuge which provides shelter for the female victims of domestic abuse. In 1998/99 the MALE help line received 8,200 calls: 47% from male victims, 25% from male perpetrators, 5% from female perpetrators, and 10% from men who had been abused physically or sexually as children²⁴. Similar help lines have been set up in other countries such as the US and Canada but they are typically under-funded and run by untrained volunteers²⁵.

To be genuinely helpful to callers, all help lines need to be properly funded and staffed by competent people with the appropriate skills and information. In the area of domestic violence, there are the additional complexities of separate help lines for male and female victims. This may not be essential in the long-term but the highly charged nature of the issues may make it sensible for the foreseeable future. There is also the perception that staff trained to take calls from female victims may not be equally disposed to take calls from male victims, and vice versa. One observer of the situation in the US suggested that staff working with female victims may view male callers in a negative light: “domestic violence shelter workers are trained to take calls from men as crank calls. From their perspective, if a man calls claiming to be a victim, it's actually a perpetrator trying to get information on how to beat the system”²⁶.

As regards the dissemination of information about help lines, there would seem to be no reason why information about male and female help lines could not be published on the same leaflets and distributed widely through health centres, Garda stations, doctor's surgeries, etc. Gender equality would be preferable with regard to these publications so that men and women suffering from domestic violence could receive relevant information from the same leaflet.

²⁴ MALE Merton Refuge, 1999.

²⁵ Cook, 1997.

²⁶ *ibid*:64.

5.5 Group Support

Despite the limited research in this area there is some evidence to suggest that, apart from help lines, the most important source of help for male victims is a support group. One US study of abused husbands found that their primary service needs were met through support groups²⁷. Other commentators suggest likewise: “Every community should provide support groups for all victims of domestic violence. Sharing common experiences truly works wonders towards helping individuals rebuild shattered lives”²⁸. In Britain, two researchers interviewed 20 male victims of domestic violence in the north-western region of England and asked each of them if they saw a need for a help-line or refuge centre for men. Twelve of the men felt they badly needed somebody sympathetic to talk to, and that a help-line would go some way to help, but they also needed “somewhere to go and chat so we realise that it's OK to ask for help and support, and that we are not to blame”. However, they were extremely concerned about anonymity: “I don't know how many men would openly admit that their wife beats them up”²⁹. In Ireland AMEN has found that support groups are enormously helpful to male victims but their work is limited by lack of funding for trained facilitators and for renting regular meeting places.

As with help lines, running support groups is a skilled undertaking particularly when the issue is as sensitive as domestic violence. Victims can be a great source of support to each other but the efficacy of these groups can be greatly enhanced by a skilled facilitator and this should be borne in mind in setting up these groups.

5.6 Refuges

It is generally accepted that, where domestic violence cannot be stopped while a couple continue to live together, then it should be the perpetrator rather than the victim who is obliged to leave the family home. In practice it is not always possible to achieve this ideal and refuges are necessary for the shelter and protection of victims and their children. A further complicating factor is that half of all domestic violence is mutual.

The experience of AMEN in Ireland and MALE in the UK suggests that refuges are not a priority for the male victims of domestic violence unless they have had to leave home with dependent children. Male victims who are forced to leave home may need immediate

²⁷ Minnesota Department of Corrections, cited by Pagelow, 1985:187.

²⁸ Cook, 1997:154; see also Farrell, 1990:58.

²⁹ Stitt & Macklin, 1995.

accommodation but this could be provided through bed-and-breakfast rather than refuges. Both organisations already work in partnership with the local health services to find this type of accommodation for male victims who have had to leave home.

One of the urban myths that has arisen about refuges for male victims is that many of them have had to close because of lack of clients. We have not been able to find evidence to confirm this. However one of the “refuges” in London which we examined turned out to be a house which was open to male victims for a week as part of a campaign to raise awareness about domestic violence against men; it was never intended as a refuge, never funded as a refuge and never run as a refuge in the normal sense. In any case, as already suggested, there are some doubts as to whether refuges are required for the male victims of domestic violence, unless there are young dependent children involved.

5.7 Counselling

The rationale for counselling was clearly outlined by the Task Force on Violence Against Women and probably applies equally to male victims even though it was specifically formulated in terms of the needs of female victims: “Living with abuse can lead to depression, low self-esteem, and other psychological effects for both women and their children. It is important that women have access to counselling and personal support to help rebuild their confidence in themselves, to heal the hurt, and to give them the strength to make a new life. Participation in general self-development programmes and survivors’ support groups can be of great benefit to women. In addition, access to individual counselling is often required”³⁰.

One of the leading US researchers in marital therapy has suggested that individual counselling may be required in cases of severe domestic violence but couple counselling may be appropriate in treating “lower levels of verbal and physical aggression that are commonly self-reported by both men and women that are not in self-defence. ... Preventive efforts are sorely needed to stop the escalation of physical aggression from mild to severe levels of physical aggression”³¹. Other research on married couples in counselling where mutual violence was one of the presenting problems found that these couples did not spontaneously identify their physical aggression as a marital problem³². Generally speaking, the small amount of research

³⁰ Task Force on Violence Against Women, 1997:78.

³¹ O’Leary, 1993:20.

³² Vivian & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 1994; see also O’Leary & Vivian, 1990.

that is available about the needs of male victims suggests that they would avail of counselling services³³.

Our observations above about how professionals perceive domestic violence generally and male and female victims in particular apply equally to counsellors. One US counsellor has suggested that the existing consensus about domestic violence which is held by most counsellors has the effect of making it “less likely for victimised men to receive the same recognition from us as mental health counsellors.... (thus) we can unintentionally add to the denial problem we recognise men exhibiting in therapy. ... When I was unaware of the research regarding battered men, I never saw battered men or physically abusive women in my counselling. Subsequent to my own learning of the prevalence of physically abused men, I began (as well as continue) to see proportionately equal numbers of battered men and women as well as abusive men and women”³⁴. Other commentators have suggested that “many, many therapists show an anti-male bias when it comes to domestic violence”³⁵.

5.8 Legal Issues

In Ireland as elsewhere there is a perception that, in matters of family law, it is harder for men than women to get justice in the courts. In the US, one commentator has observed: “The idea that a man will not be given a fair and equal opportunity in the field of domestic relations law is a pervasive belief. This belief directly affects the ability of the abused man to seek relief under the law”³⁶. In Ireland groups such as Parental Equality and AMEN have also spoken of what they see as bias in the family courts against men and the two AMEN conferences in 1998 and 2000 heard evidence from victims about how difficult it can be to get justice in the courts. Some Irish barristers have also suggested that a higher standard of proof may be needed for male than female complainants of domestic violence³⁷. It is difficult to assess these observations independently because family court hearings are not heard in public and no record is kept of the proceedings, but they are matters which merit further investigation. At the same time, and this is surely symptomatic of just how fraught the issue of domestic violence can be, women victims also have reservations about the court system as the Task Force on Violence Against Women pointed out: “Many women ... feel that the legal and

³³ See for example Stitt & Macklin, 1995.

³⁴ Macchietto, 1992:375-385; see also Krug, 1989:112; Cook, 1997:106.

³⁵ Cook, 1997:95.

³⁶ *ibid*:78.

³⁷ Wood, 1998; Corrigan, 1998.

court systems minimise the seriousness of crimes committed against women, fail to dispense justice and make women feel at fault for what has happened”³⁸.

The two main functions of the family law system in Ireland is protection from domestic violence and separation from one's partner. One study has suggested that the number of cases coming before the courts under each of these functions is approximately equal³⁹. The same study also found that 85% of all family law cases – and virtually 100% of all domestic violence cases - are initiated by women leading the authors to conclude that, in Ireland, family law is “a woman’s resource rather than a man’s resource”⁴⁰. This clearly calls for some explanation in view of the evidence reviewed in Chapters Three and Four above and the fact that the letter of Irish law on domestic violence is gender neutral. However we are not in a position to offer any definitive explanation since no research has been carried out on why male victims do not seek legal redress. Moreover we know virtually nothing about those female victims who seek legal redress since statistics on barring and protection orders alone “tell us nothing about the nature of the violence (how often it is psychological rather than physical, how repetitive it is, how severe it is), about the victims and perpetrators (we do not know, for example, how often children as well as women are victims), about the kind of responses the courts give (we do not know, for example, why more than half the barring applications made in 1993-94 were not granted), and the pattern of enforcement of orders issued, about rates of recidivism, or about any other practical outcome as far as families are concerned”⁴¹. It is worth noting however that legal cases have been taken by male victims of domestic violence in the US, the UK, Canada and Australia⁴².

In 1998 the Law Reform Committee of the Law Society of Ireland carried out a survey of 100 family law solicitors to examine the operation and effectiveness of the provisions of the Domestic Violence Act, 1996⁴³. This survey, which yielded a response rate of 83%, found that there are large variations in the way the legislation is implemented particularly on matters such as the standard of proof necessary to establish abuse and the setting of dates for a full court hearing in cases where men have had ex parte interim barring orders issued against them in their absence and have not been informed by the court of the allegations made against them. These findings are a cause for concern – to women as well as men – and indicate that the trauma of domestic violence may be exacerbated rather than ameliorated by the legal system

³⁸ Task Force on Violence Against Women. 1997:11.

³⁹ Fahey & Lyons, 1995:22.

⁴⁰ *ibid*:136

⁴¹ *ibid*:2.

⁴² See Bates, 1981.

as it operates at present. For that reason, many of the recommendations made by the Law Reform Committee of the Law Society of Ireland offer hope that the situation can be improved.

5.9 Counselling for Female Perpetrators

As required by our brief, this chapter has focussed on the service needs of male victims of domestic violence. However it is appropriate to consider briefly the needs of female perpetrators since these too have been largely ignored in the literature on domestic violence. This approach is in line with the overall findings and theme of the report which suggests that our understanding of the field of domestic violence needs to be broadened to include female perpetrators as well as male victims. Our review does not resolve the healthy dispute in the literature over the relative size of the different categories of domestic violence (male and female victims, male and female perpetrators) but there is sufficient research evidence to suggest that all of these categories are substantial enough to be included within any framework which purports to deal with domestic violence in a comprehensive way.

As with services for male victims, there is very little research on services for female perpetrators. As one US counsellor and psychotherapist has observed: “Presently, services for abusive women dealing with their abusive behaviour are as limited as services for victimised men”⁴⁴. In London the co-ordinator of MALE has written: “There is a distinct lack of services available to people who are taking responsibility for their abusive behaviour and are looking for behaviour modification programmes”⁴⁵.

As we have seen in Chapter Four, relatively little is known about female perpetrators essentially because most research has assumed that they act in self-defence. While it is certainly true that some female perpetration in heterosexual relationships is self-defence, the evidence reviewed in Chapter Four suggested that this is not the only or even the main motivation. In the New Zealand study, the authors found some evidence for self-defence but they also found that female perpetrators seem to make a rational choice to be violent because “they may understand that the likelihood is very low that they will injure their partner or be prosecuted ... and given social norms constraining men's behaviour toward women, women may also anticipate that few men will hit back”⁴⁶. Whatever the reason, the possibility cannot

⁴³ Law Society of Ireland, 1999; MacIntyre, 2000.

⁴⁴ Macchietto, 1992:376.

⁴⁵ Les Davidson in MALE Merton Refuge, 1999.

⁴⁶ Magdol et al., 1997:76.

be ignored that women perpetrators may also need services to help address their violent behaviour and this is currently denied them⁴⁷. From the perspective of prevention, these services should also include educational interventions in order to raise awareness among girls as well as boys of the reality of aggression and violence and the need to develop communication and conflict resolution skills as part of healthy intimate relationships⁴⁸.

5.10 The Needs of Children

The impact of domestic violence on children is outside the strict scope of this study but no review of the topic would be complete without adverting to the fact that children are invariably victimised when there is domestic violence between their parents. There is widespread agreement among researchers that children are more adversely affected by conflict between their parents than by either marital distress or divorce and this adversity increases with the severity and frequency of the conflict⁴⁹. Children who witness domestic violence run a significant risk of themselves becoming anti-social, violent and sexually abusive both in childhood and in adult life⁵⁰. In addition, children who live in homes where there is domestic violence between their parents are also more likely to become victims of physical abuse themselves⁵¹. These considerations serve to further broaden our understanding of domestic violence and the scope of interventions required to address it. In particular they highlight the need for professionals to be aware that child abuse may itself be an indicator of domestic violence and vice versa and the need to understand the family dynamic at work in these cases – as seen from the perspective of all family members – before interventions are made.

5.11 Conclusion

We have seen in this chapter that there are virtually no services for male victims of domestic violence even in countries where there is statistical evidence to indicate that domestic violence against men is a substantial reality. The reason for this is not just the existing consensus about domestic violence – and the resistance which this creates to the idea that men could be victimised by women – but the reluctance of male victims themselves to present for services. The reality of domestic violence for men as well as women is that it is a private, hidden and often shameful form of suffering that few ever hear about other than the men, women and

⁴⁷ See Steinmetz cited in Cook:1997:113.

⁴⁸ See Straus & Gelles, 1990:105.

⁴⁹ Holtzworth-Munroe, et al, 1997:148-149; Najman, et al, 1997.

⁵⁰ Haapalo & Pokela, 1999:111.

⁵¹ Moffitt & Caspi, 1998.

children who are immediately involved. The stigma of being involved in a violent relationship and the fear of even more negative consequences if others know about it lead victims and perpetrators to conspire in keeping a lid of secrecy on the violence in their relationship so that women as well as men are reluctant to present for services until their situation becomes intolerable. However there is considerable evidence that men are even more reluctant than women to report their own victimisation to the police or medical authorities and those that do often have negative experiences from these services and the professionals involved. Even if we allow for the fact that men seem to suffer less negative outcomes of domestic violence than women, particularly in terms of physical injuries, these differences are scarcely sufficient to account for the major disparity between the number of men and women who present for services.

It is well recognised that one of the ways of addressing the problem of domestic violence against women is to raise public awareness that the problem exists. However a major problem facing the male victims of domestic violence is that public awareness and professional perceptions are often very heavily influenced by the existing consensus on this issue; this can exacerbate the problems of male victims because it effectively denies the reality of their experience and contributes to the mutually reinforcing process that men do not present for services while services, in turn, do not develop to respond to men's needs.

Help lines, support groups and counselling have a role in supporting male victims as they do for female victims. However male help lines are typically under-funded and sometimes run by untrained volunteers. Also, there seems to be no good reason why information about male and female help lines could not be published on the same leaflets and disseminated widely through health centres, Garda stations, doctor's surgeries, etc.

As might be expected, much of the divisiveness associated with domestic violence is also mirrored in relatively high levels of dissatisfaction by men as well as women with the way in which the legal system handles this issue and it is probably no exaggeration to say that, in some cases at least, the trauma of domestic violence may be exacerbated rather than ameliorated by the legal system as it operates at present. In Ireland as elsewhere there is a perception that, in matters of family law, it is harder for men than women to get justice in the courts. Whether or not this is true, it is still difficult to explain why there have been very few cases in Ireland taken by male victims against their female perpetrators in view of the evidence reviewed in Chapters Three and Four above and the fact that the letter of Irish law on domestic violence is gender neutral. We are not in a position to offer any definitive explanation of this

until more thorough research has been carried out on the way in which the cases are processed through the courts. However we do know from a study by the Law Reform Committee of the Law Society of Ireland that there are serious inadequacies in the present system – which adversely affect men as well as women – and these need to be addressed.

The findings in this chapter – and in the report generally – point to the need for a larger and more inclusive paradigm of domestic violence than is currently allowable within the existing consensus. By the same reasoning, these findings also make it extremely difficult to credibly sustain a perspective on domestic violence which assumes that, in the vast majority of cases, men are its only perpetrators and women its only victims. The broader and more inclusive paradigm of domestic violence which is suggested by the findings of this report in no way diminish what we already know about the suffering caused to women at the hands of men; nor should it be used in any way as an excuse to reduce services for women victims of domestic violence. A more inclusive approach to domestic violence should not create competition between victims by minimising the experiences of men at the expense of women or vice versa. Although we have no firm evidence on the true prevalence of domestic violence in Ireland, at least not with respect to male victims and female perpetrators, it seems unlikely that it should be significantly different to other English-speaking developed countries such as the US, the UK, Canada or New Zealand. For this reason, it would be reasonable to proceed on the assumption that domestic violence against men is a significant problem and mutual violence is the main form in which domestic violence tends to occur. That is the basis for a more inclusive paradigm of domestic violence and the starting point for a more comprehensive approach to the development of services for the victims and perpetrators of domestic violence.

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