

Executive summary

The literature review summarised here constitutes research with a purpose: that is to identify and explore literature which is, or may be, relevant to understanding the position of men in Scotland who experience domestic abuse. It is “action research” - the intention is that the information presented here will be used as a reference point for further research and policy development in relation to the many issues surrounding men’s experience of domestic abuse, that it will empower men who have experienced domestic abuse to contribute to filling in the gaps in our knowledge *and* that it will support and inform service providers who seek to respond to all those who experience domestic abuse and the children affected by that abuse.

Recognition of the many and varied needs of men in no way implies any desire for a reduction in recognition of the abuse experienced by women. Addressing domestic abuse is not a “zero sum” situation where recognition of the needs of one takes anything away from recognition of the needs of any other. Challenging all forms and incidents of abuse will make Scottish society better for all.

The majority of the work on this review was completed in late 2012 though at some points it has been possible to include some literature from 2013. To download the full literature review and further copies of this summary please go to the “Research” area at www.amis.org.uk. The author welcomes comments and correspondence, including suggestions for inclusion in future editions of the review - b.dempsey@dundee.ac.uk.

Chapter 1: The absent voices of men

In recent years those producing research publications, policy documents and publicity materials on many social issues have rightly made efforts to include some direct presentation of the “voice” of the people affected by the issue. This is particularly the case with feminist research into domestic abuse experienced by women in mixed-sex relationships. The review therefore includes many quotes from men who have experienced abuse.

A review of the literature quickly reveals an absence of the voices of those men who have experienced domestic abuse. Most striking of all is the absence of any attention being paid to the ‘lived experience’ of abused men in the political and policy debate on domestic abuse. It is even true of much of the literature supposedly addressing the issue of men’s experience of abuse. Abused men (and particular groups of men, eg, heterosexual, BME and/or older men) are often labelled as “hard to reach” though with appropriate motivation and methodologies

“Nobody would say boo to me, yet she controlled everything I did.” (AMIS Helpline)

“hard to reach” researchers can find ways to access men’s experiences, with the work of Hines providing an example of good practice (Hines et al 2007, see also Hester & Donovan 2009).

Chapter 2: Men’s reporting of abuse

Reliable quantitative information about all aspects of domestic abuse is notoriously difficult to obtain for a number of reasons. However, what we do know is that significant numbers of men do take the difficult step of coming forward to report the abuse that they have experienced.

The most recent figures (Scottish Government 2012a) show that in 2011/12 there were 9,569 reports to the police of a domestic abuse incident where the ‘victim’ was male and the perpetrator female and 659 reports where there was a male ‘victim’ of a male perpetrator (where the sex of the parties were recorded). The proportion of reports relating to male ‘victims’ to total ‘victims’ in particular police force areas was generally around 15% but ranged from 9% in Dumfries and Galloway to 21% in Strathclyde.

The “Partner Abuse” analysis of the 2010/2011 Scottish Crime and Justice Survey (Scottish Government 2011a) shows that the risk of experiencing partner abuse in the prior 12 months was 3% for both men and women; the best estimate of numbers of persons in the Scottish population who had experienced domestic abuse during their lives from the age of 16 was 257,000 men and 403,000 women and that the reported risk of having experienced partner abuse since the age of 16 was 13% for men compared to 19% for women. Children were present in 25% of the cases where a man had experienced abuse within the previous 12 months.

“I’m not afraid of her - but I do worry that she may carry out her threat to use a knife. I set up a broom behind the door so I know she’s coming.” (AMIS Helpline)

“My parents and also a friend have both said they don’t know why I’ve put up with it for so long. My brother said ‘None of us could say anything because she’s your wife.’ I wish they’d said something.” (AMIS Helpline)

Underreporting is particularly problematic; in relation to who, if anyone, was made aware of the abuse, where abuse had occurred within the prior year, 42% of abused men did not tell anyone (compared to 19% of abused women) and in only 9% of cases in the prior year which involved abused men did the police come to know of the abuse (compared to 24% for women). As noted above, there are difficulties in relation to the detail of such numbers but what is clear is that Scotland has a significant problem in relation to domestic abuse directed against men.

In addition to a number of practical barriers such as a lack of accessible services to support abused men, and psychological barriers such as embarrassment and fear of being disbelieved, an additional major obstacle to men reporting the abuse they experience is the “public story” of domestic abuse which presents domestic abuse as something which male perpetrators inflict on female partners (Donovan and Hester 2010). This powerful insight was developed through consideration of the neglected and marginalised position of ‘victims’ and perpetrators in same-sex relationships and, it is argued, is applicable to heterosexual men who experience domestic abuse as it is to trans, bi and gay men.

Chapter 3: Types of abuse reported by men

The securing of high-quality, detailed qualitative information about men’s experience of domestic abuse is hampered by a number of factors including the absence of appropriate services which might attend to and record such experiences and by a failure on the part of researchers to engage with the issue. However, as Gadd revealed some time ago,

Key Recommendations

In order to capture the reality of men’s experience of domestic abuse and to respond to abused men’s needs and the needs of their children and other family members –

- Policy responses to, and service provision for, men who experience domestic abuse should be evidence-based. Appropriate methodologies can be developed for both academic and practitioner research.
- The needs of children affected by abuse perpetrated against their fathers or other male carers must be addressed by central and local government and other service providers as a matter of the greatest urgency.
- Police Scotland, the NHS and others should build on already existing good practice to seek ways to ensure that abused men are able to disclose their experiences.

the “limited qualitative research on this topic suggests that there are some differences in the nature and context of the abuses experienced by gay and heterosexual men, as well as between male and female victims generally, although there are also many similarities.” (Gadd et al 2002).

Gadd’s view is borne out by such evidence as we have in relation to the types of abuse experienced by men in Scotland, primarily from the analysis of the 2010/11 Scottish Crime and Justice Survey (Scottish Government, 2011a).

The Survey reveals that 10% of men reported that they had experienced psychological abuse from at least one partner during their adult life compared to 17% of women reporting such abuse. The abuse included jealous or controlling behaviour (reported by 6% of men and 12% of women), being repeatedly made to feel worthless (3% of men and 10% of women), threats of physical harm (2% of men and 5% of women), isolation from friends and relatives (3% of men and 6% of women) and perpetrator threats to hurt themselves or actually hurting themselves as a means of control (2% of men and 4% of women). On average these men experienced just over 2 forms of psychological abuse and women on average between 3 and 4 forms. By any standard this reveals a significant problem in society that should be addressed.

Physical forms of abuse were reported by 10% of men since the age of 16 compared to 14% of

women. This included having things thrown at them (reported by 8% of men and 8% of women) being kicked, bitten or hit (4% of men and 7% of women), having a weapon used (2% of men and 3% of women). Some forms of abuse, such as choking (reported by 0% of men and 3% of women) or being

forced to engage in sexual intercourse (0% of men and 3% of women) are not reported by men in sufficient numbers to

register at the “all men” level. However, there is evidence of a greater level of risk (or a greater willingness to report) among certain groups of men with 2% of men between the ages of 16 and 24 who reported abuse stating they had been forced to engage in sexual intercourse and 3% stating they had been forced to engage in other types of sexual activity. Abused men, on average, experienced almost two forms of physical abuse compared to abused women who, on average, experienced almost three.

In the absence of substantial qualitative research in Scotland, information may be drawn from other jurisdictions (e.g. Hines et al 2007). Of particular interest is a detailed study of men’s experience of domestic abuse in Northern Ireland which reveals a wide range of abusive behaviour directed at men by their partners including physical abuse, sleep deprivation and false accusations of abuse and that suicidal ideation and even attempts at suicide were a not uncommon consequence for these men (e.g. Brogden & Nijhar 2004).

“I wouldn’t say I’d been abused in the marriage though she did hit me.” (AMIS Helpline)

Key Recommendations

- The role of the “public story” of domestic abuse in marginalising men who experience abuse should be considered in policy development and research. Anti-domestic abuse campaigns should include reference to, and images of, men. Representation of domestic abuse in newspapers, magazines and television should be inclusive of men’s experiences.
- Research into, and policy responses to, the experiences of abused men should engage with insights from gender theory to explore how gender inequality and hegemonic masculinity negatively affect abused men. Insights from the work on gay, bisexual and trans men’s experience of domestic abuse should be developed.
- Those working in the legal system (including solicitors, police, procurators and the judiciary) should identify and remove barriers to men seeking to access legal protection, whether civil or criminal.

Chapter 4: The reported impact of domestic abuse on men

Just as the types of abuse reported by men are similar to the types of abuse reported by women, the impact of that abuse is similar. What appears to be different is that there is an unwillingness on the part of many men to take the abuse they suffer seriously.

The Survey referenced above shows that abused men reported psychological or emotional problems such as difficulty sleeping, nightmares, depression or low self-esteem (28% of abused men, 42% of abused women), stopping trusting people or other relationship difficulties (14% men, 26% women), fear, anxiety and panic attacks (10% men, 28% women) and isolation from family and friends (10% men, 21% women). However, abused women were far more likely than abused men to say they considered the abuse perpetrated against them to be a crime and abused men were far more likely than abused women to take the view that the abuse they were subjected to was “just something that happens” (Scottish Government 2011a).

One significant consequence of domestic abuse perpetrated against men, as with women, is self-harm, including the misuse of alcohol as a coping

strategy (e.g. Brogden & Nijhar 2004 and Bell 2009) and suicide (e.g. Hines et al 2007). The complex relationship between alcohol and domestic abuse is

well-recognised (e.g. Scottish Women’s Aid 2010c) though under-researched.

The barriers that abused men face in understanding their experiences are not only attributable to a lack of accessible support

services and the marginalisation of men in the “public story” of domestic abuse but are also related to sexist stereotypes of what it means to be a “real man”. Exploration of the barriers to men taking seriously the abuse they are subjected to should draw on important theoretical work including that on the role of “hegemonic masculinity” (Connell 2005) and innovative work carried out within LGBT communities (e.g. Donovan et al 2006, Roch et al 2010 and Whiting 2008).

Chapter 5: Resilience, help-seeking and screening

Next to nothing has been published about the coping methods and help-seeking of Scottish men who experience domestic abuse as their voices are simply not sought out.

Brogden and Nijhar’s study in Northern Ireland reveals that the men they interviewed coped by

“I think another whole problem as to how the domestic abuse issues are viewed, my child is unable to get support because it is not their mother but their father that was being abused. If it was happening to a woman they would get help ... [services] should be open to the child.” (Scottish Human Rights Commission 2012)

Key Recommendations

- As a priority, resources should be devoted to capturing and respecting the “lived experience” and the “voice” of men who experience domestic abuse. Attention should be paid to the potentially different experiences, challenges and strengths of a diverse range of men (e.g. older men, BME men).
- Service providers should address their responsibilities under the Equality Duty and/or the charity regulator’s equality requirements by following good practice demonstrated by, e.g., Citizen’s Advice Scotland and Victim Support Scotland. Where services wish to make themselves available to abused men and their children that should be made clear by way of overt statements and inclusive imagery and case studies.

attempting to conceal the abuse from family, friends and workmates, by (mis)using alcohol and by spending long hours at work (Brogden & Nijhar 2004). We know that at a UK level, gay and bisexual men who disclose tend to seek help from friends, counsellors or relatives (52%, 30% and 27% respectively) rather than GPs, “gay” support services or the police (17%, 16% and 11% respectively) (Donovan et al 2006).

The difficult issue of “screening” or “risk assessing” those who seek help is raised in a particularly sharp way for abused men. The practice of trying to evaluate the veracity of a service user’s “story” raises sensitivities, in particular whether the service provider will be seen as trustworthy if they do not adopt a position that a person seeking their help is to be believed. No robust justification has been provided for screening men (and women in same-sex relationships) but not women in mixed-sex relationships and in the interests of appropriate service provision it is imperative that the issue be addressed openly as a matter of urgency.

Although some men in Scotland are prepared to report the abuse they have suffered to the police (such reports being made on 10,228 occasions in 2011/12, with an estimated 91% of incidences going unreported, see above), the evidence we have indicates that very few men are, e.g., able to make use of civil protection orders (Cavanagh et al 2003).

Chapter 6:

Intersections: Particular groups of men

The danger of paying insufficient attention to the importance of different elements of a person’s identity has been commented on in relation to the response to women’s experience of domestic abuse. Generalisations about “women’s experiences” can serve to make invisible the particular experiences of, e.g., black and minority ethnic women, and/or older women, and/or women living in poverty which not only disrespects the experiences of a large number of women but also militates against addressing their needs (e.g. Sokoloff 2005).

This also affects the question of how to respond to men’s experiences of domestic abuse and those concerned about abused men must be alive to the need to acknowledge both the barriers facing men from different backgrounds but also their resilience and strength. Such evidence as there is is explored in relation to men who are fathers, and/or heterosexual and/or disabled and/or from bme communities and/or asylum seekers and/or experiencing economic disadvantage, and/or gay, bisexual or transgender.

Given the evidence of the significant negative impact on children of witnessing domestic abuse against an adult carer, the failure to engage with abused men who are fathers should be a matter of significant and urgent concern. In 25% of cases of

“She’s mentally ill. I know she’s not doing this on purpose. I know she loves me.” (US study, Hines and Douglas, 2010)

Key Recommendations

- Public sector service providers such as the NHS, local authorities and the police must, as a matter of urgency, review their compliance with their legal obligations under the Equality Duty and may draw on Children in Scotland’s project “Making the Gender Equality Duty Real for Children, Young People and their Fathers”.
- Where some men trivialise the abuse they experience as “just something that happens” that should not be used to justify lack of recognition and support. Awareness raising campaigns should be developed that make clear that domestic abuse in all its forms is not something that will be tolerated or ignored in Scottish society.
- Innovative service provision for both women and men who abuse their male partners should be developed.

domestic abuse against a man there are children present (Scottish Government 2011a) and the lack of recognition of these children in the discourse on domestic abuse and in service provision in Scotland is unsustainable.

The one group of men in Scotland whose experience of domestic abuse have been addressed to some limited degree is trans, bisexual and/or gay men and this innovative work should be built upon in respect of all men who experience domestic abuse in Scotland (e.g. Donovan et al 2006, Roch et al 2010 and Whiting 2008).

Chapter 7: Responses

The challenges in ensuring that services respond appropriately to men have been explored at some length in a report commissioned by the BIG Lottery Fund (Johal et al 2012). The report identifies that, e.g., men are less likely than women to take time off work to attend medical appointments and that accessing services can be seen as “unmanly” so that fear of stigmatisation is a significant barrier. What the research identifies as the “lack of discourse” barrier is especially true of the lack of response to abused men’s experiences - “[p]erhaps one of the biggest barriers in engaging men into social projects is this overall resistance to engage with gender as an issue from a male perspective. Despite evidence that tells us that male engagement is an issue, we do not rethink our approach.” (Johal et al 2012).

Having said that, there are examples of good practice by, e.g., the police and some voluntary sector organisations such as Citizens Advice Scotland and the Scottish Domestic Abuse Helpline. In addition, insights from service provision to women who experience abuse may also be applied to men who seek support – a key document for healthcare workers in the NHS in Scotland stresses

the need to “Listen carefully .. Often requests are veiled or oblique Believe her and say so.” (Scottish Executive 2003b) and it is difficult to see why healthcare workers should not take the same approach to abused men and their children. The Big Lottery good practice guide for organisations includes such suggestions as “consult with men about their needs and preferences. ... Consider active efforts to seek men’s views. ... Make sure your use of language and images shows that you’re interested in male involvement.” (BIG Lottery Fund 2012). By using these insights, service providers can ensure that they are taking appropriate steps to meet the needs of abused men and their children.

The criminal law and civil law response to men’s experience of domestic abuse is explored at some length in the review which reflects the law’s importance in the public discourse and also the

importance of the services associated with law (in particular those delivered by the police, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) and the judiciary). Concerns are raised about

the lack of information in relation to men’s experiences of seeking help from the law given most research in the area fails to engage with men (e.g. Cavanagh et al 2003 and Reid Howie Associates 2007). Efforts must be made to take account of men’s experiences of accessing protection under the

law, whether that be in relation to the response of police officers, solicitors and other advisors such as CABx, the courts whether they be ordinary courts or specialist domestic abuse courts and so on. The issue of training for police officers, procurator’s

fiscal and the judiciary will be key.

Other public sector service providers, including local authorities and the NHS, appear to have replaced “domestic abuse services” with “violence against women” services: while the violence against women agenda is important, some of these public services appear to be failing to provide appropriate services to men and their children or at least failing

“It’s a hidden area ... a lot of men are too embarrassed to come forward ... ah ... but if you look at other organisation’s literature, it tends to be, unfortunately, very one-sided and poses a major problem.” (Slater 2013)

“If I report the abuse it’ll look like I’m the one doing something. I’m going to a solicitor to protect myself. My biggest concern is all the abuse and anger I’ve taken the brunt of – if I’m not there it may all be directed to the kids. She has been verbally abusive to them and slapped them across the head.” (AMIS Helpline)

to make clear that services are open to men and that staff are equipped with an understanding of barriers to men's help seeking. This is especially important in light of the new Public Sector Equality Duty, and all public bodies should take steps to review their services in light of that duty to ensure appropriate services are provided which take account of the particular needs and experiences of different groups in society.

"No, no it never goes away, no." (Pain 2012)

Chapter 8: Understanding perpetrators of abuse against men

There is very little evidence of engagement with developing an appropriate response to perpetrators of domestic abuse against men, either in Scotland or elsewhere. This is true of the public discourse, of the policy debate, of academic research and of service provision.

There are no programmes available in Scotland for either female or male perpetrators of domestic

abuse against male partners. Not only does this leave abused men and their children at risk it leaves unaddressed the legitimate needs of those perpetrators who might seek help to change their behaviour. However, this lack of response does offer the opportunity to develop an innovative response which is sensitive to the needs of abused men (for example there is evidence that a proportion of abused men would welcome a means of having the abuse addressed without necessarily undermining the relationship between their abuser and any children of the relationship). As with programmes for female victims of male perpetrators such responses should not, however, seek to blame the victim or offer possible excuses to the perpetrator nor should they seek to minimise the abusive behaviour or fail to communicate that abuse is unacceptable (see, eg, Bowen 2009 and Buttell & Carney 2005).



Abused Men in Scotland (AMIS) is a national organisation dedicated to supporting men who are experiencing, or recovering from, domestic abuse. Our services include:

- A confidential freefone helpline **0808 800 0024** from 7 – 10pm seven nights a week. (hours are subject to change, please check the website www.amis.org.uk)
- A comprehensive website with information on domestic abuse, staying safe, real life stories, help and support available, and downloadable information guides.
- Training and support for other organisations and service providers.
- An online chat service – **coming soon!**

You can help AMIS by making a donation via www.amis.workwithus.org

Contact us on **0131 447 7449** or contact@amis.org.uk for more information.

Connect with us on Twitter **@malesurvivors**

Introduction
The absent voices of men
Men's reporting of abuse
Types of abuse reported
The reported impact of domestic abuse on men

Resilience, help-seeking and screening
Intersections: Particular groups of men
Responses
Understanding perpetrators of abuse against men
Key recommendations

Contents

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Men's experience of domestic abuse in Scotland What we know and how we can know more

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The views expressed in this review are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of either AMIS or the Scottish Government.

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