

Crime and Criminal Justice Research Findings No. 61

Domestic Abuse Against Men in Scotland

Dr David Gadd, Dr Stephen Farrall, Damian Dallimore & Nancy Lombard

Scottish Police Statistics¹ suggest that as few as 1 in 13 incidents of domestic abuse involve male victims. Yet the findings of the Scottish Crime Survey 2000² suggest that 1 in 3 of those forced or threatened by partners or ex-partners are male. Research was carried out by staff at Keele University between September 2001 and April 2002 to assess the extent and nature of the problem of domestic abuse against men in Scotland.

Main Findings

- The smaller proportions of male victims of domestic abuse identified in the statistics recorded by the police relative to the Scottish Crime Survey 2000 are largely explicable in terms of (1) male respondents misunderstanding the focus of the self-completion component of the Scottish Crime Survey, and (2) the nature of male victims' experiences and patterns of reporting to the police.
- In follow-up interviews, over one in four of those men identified as victims of domestic abuse in the Scottish Crime Survey subsequently claimed not to have experienced this form of victimisation. Some men were referring to non-domestic assaults and property crimes when they ticked boxes in the 'domestic abuse' part of the self-completion questionnaire used in the Scottish Crime Survey 2000.
- Relative to female victims of domestic abuse, those men identified as 'victims of domestic abuse' in the Scottish Crime Survey 2000 were less likely to have been repeat victims of assault, have been seriously injured, and report feeling fearful in their own homes. These factors, coupled with the embarrassment many male victims felt, partly explained the infrequency with which domestic abuse against men had come to the Scottish Police's attention.
- In addition, some of the male victims of domestic abuse identified in the Scottish Crime Survey 2000 were also assailants and therefore did not wish to draw themselves to the attention of the police. Only a minority of those men referred to as 'victims' within the published reports about the Scottish Crime Survey 2000 actually perceived themselves as victims. This remained the case even when the responses of those men who misinterpreted the remit of the self-completion questionnaire were omitted from the calculation.

¹ Scottish Executive (2001) "Domestic Abuse Recorded by the Police in Scotland, 1 January – 31 December 2000" *Statistical Bulletin: Criminal Justice Series: CrJ2001/11*, Scottish Executive: Edinburgh.

² MacPherson, S. (2002) *Domestic Violence: Findings from the 2000 Scottish Crime Survey*, Scottish Executive: Edinburgh.

Introduction

The debate about men's victimisation by partners is one that undergoes periodic revivals of interest as new commentators (re)discover the limitations of existing research and the interpretive task it demands of those who engage with it. The terms of the debate about men's victimisation often revolves around the question of whether men and women are 'equal victims' of domestic abuse. Do male victims endure the same abuses as women, as frequently and with the same consequences? Are male victims' needs quantitatively and qualitatively the same as the needs of female victims? Is there a need for services for male victims of domestic abuse running parallel to those services available to women?

In attempting to answer these questions, this research project entailed:

- A comparison of aggregate data regarding (1) incidents of domestic abuse recorded by the Scottish Police, and (2) experiences of abuse reported in the Scottish Crime Survey 2000.
- Follow-up interviews with those men who indicated in the Scottish Crime Survey 2000 that a partner or ex-partner had used force against them or threatened them;
- Telephone interviews with those organisations and agencies that provide services for male victims of domestic abuse in Scotland.

Male Victims and Incidents Recorded by the Police

The statistical datasets which document incidents of domestic abuse recorded by the police distinguish between: incidents involving male and female victims; incidents involving male and female perpetrators; incidents involving current and former partners; incidents that did and did not constitute crimes; and incidents that did and did not lead to the police taking some form of action against perpetrators.

Less than 8% of incidents reported to the police in 2000 involved male victims. 94% (of these 8%) of

incidents involving male victims also involved female perpetrators. The remaining 6% (of these 8%) of incidents involving male victims involved male perpetrators.

At an aggregate level, it appears that those who perpetrated domestic abuse against men in 2000 were (slightly) less likely:

- to have had their acts deemed criminal by the Scottish Police, and;
- to have been referred to the Procurator Fiscal,

than those who perpetrated domestic abuse against women. These aggregate differences in police action were partly attributable to the (slightly) smaller proportion of ex-partners amongst the female (relative to the male) perpetrator population known to the police. However, gender differences in the nature and severity of abuse experienced probably also contributed to these aggregate differences in police action (see below).

In general, women who perpetrate domestic abuse against men were more likely to be referred to the Procurator Fiscal than men who perpetrated abuse against men in 2000. However, the number of actual cases involved in this comparison was too small to draw meaningful inferences from.

Male Victims of Domestic Abuse and the Scottish Crime Survey 2000

The Scottish Crime Survey 2000 uncovered that:

- 19% of women and 8% per cent of men had experienced either threats or force from a partner or ex-partner at some point in their lifetime.
- 6% of women and 3% of men had experienced either threats or force from a partner or ex-partner within the last twelve months.

Most of the 'force' reported for both male and female victims involved pushing and shoving. However, male victims were half as likely as female victims to report that threats had taken place 'at least once a week'. Male victims were six times less likely than female

victims to say that force had taken place 'at least once a week'. Male victims were also less likely than female victims to report sustaining injuries. Even so, around half of those men identified as victims of domestic abuse in the Scottish Crime Survey reported sustaining injuries as a consequence of their partners' use of force on at least one occasion.

A closer analysis of the Scottish Crime Survey also uncovered socio-economic differences between male and female victims of domestic abuse. Male victims tended to be financially better off than female victims. They were less likely to be unemployed and living in rented accommodation. Male victims also tended to report better health than female victims.

Male victims of domestic abuse tended to be poorer than men who were not victims. This financial disadvantage was not necessarily a simple effect of victimisation. Financial disadvantage was most characteristic of those male victims who were divorced or separated.

Retraced Sample of Male Victims

46 of the 90 men counted as victims in the Scottish Crime Survey were retraced, 44 of which commented on the accuracy of their original responses. 13 of these 46 men said they had never experienced any form of domestic abuse. Some men explained that they were referring to crimes committed around their homes (i.e. vandalism or theft) and/or acts of stranger/acquaintance violence when they undertook the self-completion questionnaire.

31 (of the 46) men confirmed that the Scottish Crime Survey record accurately indicated that they had experienced force or threats from a partner. 22 of these 31 men agreed to take part in in-depth interviews about their experiences. Only one of these 22 men had been abused by a male partner. The remaining 21 men reported abuse perpetrated by female partners.

Several men reported domestic abuse that took life-threatening forms and/or had lasting psychological effects. However, many of the male victims re-interviewed described their partners' abuses as relatively rare and inconsequential in the longer term. Few men cited abuse as reasons for having left their partners.

The 22 men's accounts suggested that abuse frequently occurred when relationships were in crisis or 'breaking up', and/or when access to children had to be negotiated between partners who were living apart.

Only one of the men re-interviewed admitted to being the primary perpetrator of abuse in his relationship with his partner. 4 men said that they were equally abusive as their partners, and 8 admitted retaliating abusively. The remaining 9 said they had never threatened their partners or used force against them, except to restrain someone who was physically attacking them.

Only 9 of the 22 men defined themselves as victims. Those who had not sustained injuries, together with those who described only isolated incidents of abuse, and those who had themselves injured their partners, were more reluctant to view themselves as 'victims of domestic violence' than those who did not fall into these categories. None of the men who were re-interviewed claimed to be members of men's rights groups.

Telephone Interviews with Service Providers

Brief telephone interviews were conducted with representatives from regional police forces, Victim Support (Scotland), Couple Counselling, Domestic Violence Forums, specialist organisations servicing gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) populations, specialist organisations servicing male victims of domestic and sexual abuse, and men's rights groups.

Most of these representatives reported fairly limited contact with male victims of domestic abuse, but indicated they would be willing to modify the promotion of their service and the nature of its delivery if a legitimate need to do so was clearly demonstrated. A number of representatives from the police, domestic violence forums and LGBT organisations identified Victim Support as the best placed agency to develop support services for male victims of domestic abuse in Scotland.

Conclusions

The evidence available suggests that there are fewer male than female victims of domestic abuse in Scotland. Male victims' experiences of domestic abuse are not completely dissimilar to women's. Indeed, there are some men who experience prolonged and damaging forms of abuse from partners. But, in general, male victims experience abuse that is less frequent and less severe than that experienced by female victims.

Those collecting statistical data on the topic of domestic abuse in the future should pay particular attention to:

- Ensuring respondents fully understand the nature of the experiences they are being asked to disclose, and;
- Unpacking the relationship between repeat victimisation and reporting to the police.

As this research project has demonstrated, inattention to these two issues can lead to inappropriate comparisons being made.

Innovative research strategies will also be needed to adequately investigate the extent and nature of abuse experienced by men living with male partners. The number of incidents of domestic abuse between male partners documented in quantitative and qualitative datasets is currently too small to draw meaningful inferences from.

The research reported here found little evidence in either abused men's or service providers' responses to suggest that there is presently a need for a new agency whose specific remit is to support male victims of domestic abuse in Scotland. Neither does there currently appear to be a need for refuges for abused men.

However, some male victims would benefit from support and advice regarding housing and welfare. Men who are trying to separate from abusive partners could benefit from the provision of alternative accommodation (for themselves and their children) and better legal and financial support.

If you wish further copies of this Research Findings or have any enquiries about the work of CRU, please contact us at:

Scottish Executive Central Research Unit,
Third Floor West Rear
Regent Road
St Andrew's House
EDINBURGH
EH1 3DG
Tel: 0131 244-3759
Fax: 0131 244-5393
Email: cru.admin@scotland.gsi.gov.uk
Web site: www.scotland.gsi.gov.uk/cru

If you wish a copy of "Domestic Violence Against Men in Scotland", the research report which is summarised in this Research Findings, please send a cheque for £5.00 made payable to:

The Stationery Office Bookshop
71 Lothian Road
EDINBURGH
EH3 9AZ
Tel: 0870 606 5566
Fax: 0870 606 5588
<http://www.tsonline.co.uk>

This document (and other CRU Research Findings and Reports) and information about the work of CRU may be viewed on the Internet at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/cru/>

The site carries up-to-date information about social and policy research commissioned and published by CRU on behalf of the Scottish Executive. Subjects covered include transport, housing, social inclusion, rural affairs, children and young people, education, social work, community care, local government, civil justice, crime and criminal justice, regeneration, planning and women's issues. The site also allows access to information about the Scottish Household Survey.



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

