

Submission by Amen on the Home Office (London) **Consultation Proposals on Domestic Violence (June 2003)**

About Amen:

Amen is a voluntary group, founded in December 1997, which provides a confidential helpline and support services for men and their children who are victims of domestic abuse. Previously men with abusive partners suffered silently and alone. Their problems were compounded by their isolation and the lack of support services. When they approached statutory services they were met with disbelief and sometimes ridicule. Thousands of men and supportive members of their families, including their children, contact Amen every year (see appendix 4). Callers come from all walks of life, every social stratum, all age groups and from every part of Ireland. We also receive letters, emails and phone calls from people in the UK. Children regularly contact the helpline seeking assistance for their fathers. As a result of constant lobbying and media attention, the issue of male victims of domestic violence is gaining recognition in Ireland. The organisation also campaigns for support services for male victims from statutory bodies and for the inclusion of men, men's groups and men's experiences in the formulation of relevant social policy and legislation. The philosophy of the group is based on a self-help, participatory, mutual-aid approach. Most of the work is done in group situations but men are also dealt with individually. Amen has confidence in men's ability to reclaim their lives and offers men the support they need to do this. Total confidentiality is guaranteed. Since Amen was set up the number of men reporting to the Gardai has shown a steady increase. In 2000, the group opened, Sos Beag, the only known refuge for men and their children. Regrettably this five bed facility, which is supported by Meath County Council, is totally inadequate to cope with the demand.

The experiences of male victims of domestic abuse:

In its day-to-day running and in a survey of male victims in Co. Monaghan, Amen has explored the nature of violence experienced by male victims and found that the effects on men are broadly similar to the effects on women. The Monaghan study (Amen, 2000) is based on a small sample but, nevertheless, it outlines the types of abuse experienced by men and the impact this has on them. The types of abuse suffered by the men included being hit with heavy objects, having personal property damaged and having their lives threatened. They also tell of the demeaning, demoralising and degrading behaviours. One man commented, *"My scars are in my head, I cannot take them out and show them to anyone"*. Like women who are abused, men are constantly harassed, criticised and compared unfavourably to others. Much of this is witnessed by the children. The impact of the abuse on men included low self-esteem, depression, insomnia and can also impact negatively on their relationships with their children. One man is quoted as saying *"I put up with the abuse for years so that I could be with my children"*. Men are aware that if they separate from their wives/partners they will lose their homes and will no longer be in a position to care for and protect their children. All the men stated that the abuse arose from their partner's need to totally control their lives in every respect. An important finding was that 50% of the men stated that their children had also been physically abused and virtually all of them said their children witnessed the abuse.

Research:

Amen's experience and all reliable research show that domestic violence is broadly a 50/50 phenomenon. Since setting up Amen in December 1997 we have been contacted by thousands of men and concerned members of their families from all over Ireland as well as the UK. In Ireland, recent research, carried out for the Marriage and Relationship Counselling Services (MRCS), showed that women are, in fact, more likely than men to perpetrate domestic violence. This report, based on a survey of 530 clients of MRCS, found that where domestic violence occurs mutual violence accounts for 33% of cases, female perpetrated violence accounts for 41% and male perpetrated violence for 26%. It should be noted that the majority (59%) of those interviewed were women and also that the vast majority of women (85%) and men (94%) agreed with their partner's response to this question, suggesting that the self reported prevalence is quite reliable. Another survey of 1,000 couples and 1,500 individuals, carried out for ACCORD (the catholic marriage counselling service), found that in the 53% of cases where there was domestic violence, 46% involved mutual violence; in 30% of cases it was perpetrated by women only and in 24% by men only. The Department of Health and Children has also carried out research, which vindicates the MRCS research, the ACCORD research and the experience of Amen (a copy of the Preface and Executive summary of the Department of Health report are attached - Appendices 1 and 2). These findings concur with the results of all independent reliable two-sex studies and surveys carried out in other English-speaking developed countries. (Details attached appendix 3 and also on the Amen website www.amen.ie.)

Studies which portray men as predominately perpetrators are not independent, neutral, balanced two-sex studies. They are predicated on the assumption that men are the aggressors and women the victims; are based on interviews with women only; do not make any attempt to establish the views or experiences of men or are carried out by or for people or organisations with a feminist ethos, and a vested or ideological interest in promoting a distorted view of men as inherently violent and responsible for all domestic disharmony. Hardly surprising therefore that such studies wrongly portray 'men as the aggressors in the vast majority of cases'. Domestic violence is not just a "*women's issue*", it is a social issue affecting men, women and children and needs to be examined in this context, otherwise it will continue to do damage to family systems and create even bigger division within families.

It is true that most of the *recorded* complaints of domestic violence are made by women however the failure by men to complain to the authorities does not mean that men are not also suffering abuse in the home. Over the years society has come to accept that women in abusive situations in the home must be empowered to speak out about their plight and seek assistance. However it is still not socially acceptable for men to admit that they are being abused in the home. Men do not report the fact that they are being abused because they know that if they do they will meet with ridicule, disbelief and rejection. They will be described as 'wimps', told that 'big boys don't cry' and advised to 'take it on the chin like a man'. Should they seek legal redress they will be deemed to be perpetrators regardless of the evidence. Records of complaints are not a reliable indicator of the prevalence or nature of domestic violence.

The Home Office Consultation Paper 'Safety and Justice':

As Amen is not based in the jurisdiction to which this paper relates (England and Wales) and we are not sufficiently familiar with the relevant legislation and services, we cannot deal with the proposals in detail. However there are a number of general comments we would like to make based on our experience and expertise in supporting male victims of domestic abuse.

We note the statistic that *'one in four women and one in six men will suffer domestic violence at some point in their lives'* is quoted a number of times in the document. According to the consultation paper this data is taken from the 1996 British Crime Survey and provides the most robust data for domestic violence. The paper also states that it is predominantly women who suffer from domestic violence. While the data from the British Crime Survey indicates that more women than men suffer domestic violence (25% of women; 16.66% of men) the difference does not justify the claim that it is **predominately** women who suffer. The Survey was no doubt carried out to the highest professional standards, however, the data should be treated with caution, particularly as men, for cultural and other reasons, are extremely reluctant to admit that they are being abused by their wives/partners. The number of men who are abused is therefore likely to be significantly understated as compared to the number of women.

Among the questions asked in the Paper is *"What is the unmet need for support services and accommodation options, including formale victims of domestic violence? How could this be met? Is specialist refuge provision the most appropriate support?"*. While Amen deals primarily with male victims in Ireland we do receive a considerable number of requests for assistance from the UK. It would appear that the basic problem for male victims in the UK, as in Ireland, is that the authorities, without question, accept the flawed *'feminist model'* of domestic violence.

The Feminist Model of Domestic Violence:

The feminist model sees domestic violence as a gender issue. It defines domestic violence as a **'patriarchal conspiracy'** (Mullan, 2001:14) to perpetuate the superordination of men over women (Jackson & Oates, 1998:148). It must, therefore, deny female-on-male violence as well as mutual violence. It offers a simplistic view that domestic violence consists of violent men abusing innocent defenceless women. It also rejects the view that family violence is caused by personal characteristics. The complex problem of domestic violence is being presented as if it were very simple: a case of evil men attacking innocent women and children. Some even claim that men in general feel they have a "patriarchal" **right** to use violence to control women and children.

The Truth about Domestic Violence:

Domestic violence is a social and family issue, which involves male-on-female as well as female-on-male violence and also mutual violence. It can also involve sibling violence and child-on-parent violence with either gender being victims or perpetrators. The causes of such violence are many and varied and cannot be explained by any single theory or ideology. It is primarily due to personal characteristics and can include such factors as inability to communicate and negotiate; poor impulse control; substance abuse and

childhood experiences. These can apply to either men or women and where domestic violence exists can be present in both parties to some extent.

The feminist model is just a caricature of the problem. Attacking a caricature of a problem will not solve it; the truth, and the whole truth, must be told. Abusive wives or mothers must hear they need to overcome their problem, and can get help to do so.

Mutually abusive couples need help to solve their conflicts in a non-destructive manner. Abused husbands must hear that there is help and concern for them. Family violence is a human problem, not a gender problem. Government agencies, private organisations and the media must stop accepting and spreading misinformation about family violence!

It is clear that the attempts to address the serious problem of domestic violence have been hamstrung by a political agenda which seeks to avoid the reality, and place blame on "men". Such ideological approaches are not only contrary to the aim of a civil society, through seeking to promote antipathy between men & women, but impede attempts to better address the problem of DV.

While many see the well-intentioned law as a necessary shield for abused women, there is mounting evidence that it is often used as a sword in messy domestic disputes.

Appendix 1

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.

Appendix 2

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

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.

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 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.

Appendix 3

REFERENCES EXAMINING ASSAULTS BY WOMEN ON THEIR SPOUSES OR MALE PARTNERS: AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY SUMMARY

This bibliography examines 95 scholarly investigations, 79 empirical studies and 16 reviews and/or analyses, which demonstrate that women are as physically aggressive, or more aggressive, than men in their relationships with their spouses or male partners. The aggregate sample size in the reviewed studies exceeds 60,000 (see www.amen.ie).

Appendix 4

Excerpts from letters to Amen

"If I was ten minutes late coming from work, she would tear into me, often slapping me across the face; I could do nothing right for her. I washed the clothes, did the ironing and vacuumed the house before I went to work. I got up to the boys at night when they were babies while she stayed in bed. I had to leave because of the threats from her family and the beatings from my wife. I just did not know her next move. I can't take much more, watching the pain she's putting the boys and myself through. The boys need both their parents. As it is, I am afraid that I may lose my children".

Martin

"My wife has been beating me for years now but for the sake of the child and my home, I have said nothing, also because of the embarrassment of people laughing at me. I am big and she is small. Nobody would believe that when she was pregnant, she stabbed me with a knife; but for the sake of the child I let it go. I don't want to lose my child but she tells me that the judge will not believe me and he always takes the woman's side. After speaking to a Garda and Amen, I think I might have a chance to get my life back. My wife is having an affair and she stays out all night. I always took my child to Mass. Now she won't let him go with me.

Tom

When the baby was about eight to ten months old, I was feeding him when she came in and said that she did not know why I was so fond of him as he was not even mine. I felt sick but I told her I did not care, that I loved him and I would mind him. Now she only has time for her boyfriend; she is gone three and four nights a week with him. In the morning my young son says to me, "Is mammy home yet?" It is so sad to hear him say that. We would be better off on our own. She hit me across the back with the brush and said that I would soon be gone. This is a sad life. When her boyfriend sleeps with her I have to lock the door from the inside. I have no say in my house. If the judge hears this he will kick me out and take my child from me."

Jim

Dear Amen,

As far back as I can remember my Mother was the one who was physically and emotionally abusive. I watched as she hit my father with whatever was at hand over and over again. I listened as she cursed him to death and worse. My brothers and I were taught that he was a disgrace to humanity we were told that to bear his name was a shame. He was a weakling, a liar, a sneak and any other kind of filthy name she could conjure up. If she was doing something to our Father, or angry with him, we were to side with her and deny what we saw before our own eyes. We were to defend her and to abuse him alongside her. We were subject to the same abuses.

I remember anger and arguments for the early part of my childhood. I can't tell how many times my father would rush into my room in the night with my Mother hot on his trail with whatever weapon was at hand to hit him. I remember a soup ladle landed across his head, a large seashell, and a hurley on another occasion. I never saw my father hurt anyone".

Nancy

"The first time she used physical violence she bit into my arm. This was significant because it was the first time she committed physical violence. She now knew that I would not hit her back. From that point on she ruled by violence or the threat of violence. She dominated the household and she did whatever the hell she liked. In the three years before the end of the marriage, the level of violence increased. At first it was sporadic, then weekly, then several times a month, and at the end it was virtually every single day".

Sean

"My wife was frequently violent; there would not be any specific reason for a particular act of violence. It could be that she wanted to spend money we did not have, or I did not respond to her requests as quickly as she liked. She might be angry with a member of her family, or simply in one of those moods. When violence did not get her what she wanted, she would take excessive medication and claim she was going to kill herself. I now know she had no intention of doing herself any real harm".

Mark

"There is hardly a day that goes by without a thump from my wife. We have two children aged 8 and 10 years. Up to a few years ago, the children did not see or hear any of my beatings, but now my wife does not seem to mind this anymore, only to warn them that they are never to say to anyone outside what goes on in our home. No matter what I do or say, it is taken out of context, blown up and used as the start of rows. Then the beating starts and I have had black eyes, two broken teeth, bruises all over my body. The excuse I give is I had an accident or walked into a door. My own family do not know about my unhappiness in this marriage. I have a good job but my wife controls our finances. I clean, wash and cook when I come home from my work and at weekends, I polish and clean. I walk to the park with the children, but am given a certain time to return. I panic if I am late getting back, as I know I will once again get a thump. Now to everyone else, she is a lovely person, laughing and joking with visitors and her friends, but I try not to join in just in case I say the wrong things. I stay in the kitchen making the coffee or tea when her friends call. . How do I get help?"

Cormac

Hello Mary,

I wrote to you about nine months ago about the abuse of my partner.

I told you that most of the time we are happy together and madly in love. But every now and then my temper sours and I lose it to the stage of hitting him. Niall, my partner, is generally a quiet man and doesn't like any confrontation of any sort. I am extremely temperamental and dramatic of any situation. I want to stop and I just don't know what to do. The abuse is becoming more frequent. I went to a counsellor and an alternative medical doctor and a medical doctor also. I have been on Prozac (which didn't help) and alternative medicine also. Nothing seems to be helping me.

Please can you give me some address to contact or books I can read that may help me. I need to sort this out before Niall leaves me.

Deirdre