

# **The Social Work Response to Abused Men**

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## Abstract

Although the past 25 years have seen a significant increase in the recognition of female victims of domestic abuse, the same cannot be said about *male* victims, who continue to be marginalised or completely disregarded in research, literature, and subsequently, support and outreach initiatives. This dissertation examines the prevalence of abused men within the UK as well as the various responses to domestic violence from both statutory and voluntary organisations, with a particular focus on how social work should reconsider its service role within a multi-agency framework. I argue that the current social work response to domestic violence in general is inconsistent, due in part to confusion brought about by inadequate policy, guidelines for practice and formal training regarding the issue. In order to provide a more systematic response to this social problem, a non-gendered approach should be truly realised in practice, rather than following the mistakenly stereotypical notion that “domestic violence only happens to women”.

# Contents

<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>THE IMPORTANCE OF GENDER</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: AN OVERVIEW</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>ABUSED WOMEN/VIOLENT MEN: MAJORITY RULES</b> .....	<b>7</b>
STUDIES, SURVEYS AND STATISTICS (PART I) .....	7
‘BATTERED WOMEN’S SYNDROME’ .....	7
THE REFUGE MOVEMENT .....	7
<b>ABUSED MEN/VIOLENT WOMEN: MYTH OR REALITY?</b> .....	<b>9</b>
STUDIES, SURVEYS AND STATISTICS (PART II) .....	9
<i>Home Office Study 191</i> .....	9
<i>Steinmetz, Straus, Gelles</i> .....	10
<i>Other Studies</i> .....	11
THE PROBLEM WITH GENDER STEREOTYPES .....	13
<i>Women Can’t Truly Be Violent... Or Can They?</i> .....	13
<i>A Concern Over Acknowledgement</i> .....	14
WHY DON’T MEN LEAVE? .....	16
<b>CURRENT RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE</b> .....	<b>18</b>
WHAT’S BEING DONE? .....	18
WHAT’S NOT BEING DONE? ...CRITICISED? .....	19
<b>INTERVIEWS AND KEY FINDINGS</b> .....	<b>23</b>
LOTHIAN & BORDERS POLICE .....	23
EDINBURGH WOMEN’S AID .....	25
LOTHIAN GAY & LESBIAN SWITCHBOARD .....	26
COWGATE CENTRE .....	26
AMEN .....	29
SOCIAL WORK .....	31
<b>POLICY, PRACTICE AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	<b>34</b>
INADEQUACIES IN THE SOCIAL WORK RESPONSE .....	34
EDUCATION AND TRAINING .....	35
THE MULTI-AGENCY SOLUTION .....	36
<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>39</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	<b>40</b>

*Note: Permission was granted by all informants to have their names and statements used within this document.*

## Introduction

Domestic violence has been a burning issue on the political and social agenda for the last 25 years in practically all western cultures. Although this widespread problem has not been eradicated as yet, a considerable amount of attention and effort from various women's rights organisations, in particular, has led to a general public acknowledgement as an unacceptable social ill. Nevertheless, there continue to be silent victims, *both women and men*. In the course of this dissertation I will present the 'other side' of domestic violence, abused men and violent women, in an effort to signify the importance of confronting the entire scope of the problem as a whole.

Initially, I will outline the significant aspects of gender, patriarchy and feminism, leading me into defining 'domestic violence' and discussing several theories for its occurrence. Then, before tackling the central issue, I will note aspects of the 'traditional' sense of male-to-female violence, in order to effectively draw suitable comparisons. I will then offer some of the various responses to domestic violence – both voluntary and statutory – and note what is currently being done, what is not being done and what has been criticised, with a particular focus on the realm of social work. Following from there, I will discuss some of the key findings from interviews with a number of respondents, representing various agencies and organisations. Through this, I hope to highlight where an overlap of services, if any, currently exists or could be developed within a multi-agency solution, as well as to discover where social work intervention appears to be lacking. In the final section, I will discuss policy and practice, emphasising the inadequacies of the current social work response and offering support for the argument that social work could play a significant role within a multi-agency framework.

It should be understood that my intentions are not to downplay or disregard violence against women, a subject of major social concern that has taken a number of years to become widely recognised. My goal is merely to present the argument that domestic violence is non-gendered and requires a suitable response for all victims and perpetrators, irrespective of their sex.

## The Importance of Gender

It is not possible to understand the personal or social world without taking a gendered perspective. We are not able as professionals to intervene appropriately or justly in people's lives unless we perceive the ways in which women are disadvantaged by an unequal dispersal of power, and in which both men and women are constrained by over-rigid and falsely dichotomized role and relationship expectations. (Mullender 1997: 42)

From birth, males and females are socialised into gender roles defined by their particular cultures, and these roles persist by being deeply rooted in both nature and nurture (Bernstein et al 1994). By the age of two, children have a partial conceptualisation of gender, allowing them to classify themselves as either 'girls' or 'boys', and having the ability to categorise others. However, it is not until the age of five or six that children realise the permanence of gender or that differences between males and females are anatomically based (Giddens 1993). Confirmation of gender roles and identity continues through social training from both adults and peers during childhood and adolescence (Bernstein et al 1994).

Built upon the traditional gender roles of women as submissive and men as dominant is the concept of 'patriarchy' which is argued to exist within practically every culture in the world. The institutionalisation of patriarchy goes beyond simply the reproductive sphere to become "embedded in subtle and not-so-subtle networks connecting material conditions of life, powerful social controls and ideologies" (Giddens 1993: 173). As a reactionary stand to patriarchy, feminism emerged in the late eighteenth century in a struggle to defend and expand the rights of women. A resurgence of feminism occurred in the late 1960s through the civil rights movement, and since then, feminism has become a major influence throughout the world. However, in the 1980's a feminist backlash began to emerge, as 'right-thinkers' in major countries such as the US and UK blamed feminism for undermining marriage and contributing to single-parent families (Giddens 1993).

The influence of feminism against the pervasiveness of patriarchy, along with an understanding of socially-prescribed gender roles, both act to form the basis of many

arguments surrounding domestic violence to be presented below. However, before focusing on victims and perpetrators that are both male *and* female, the concept of domestic violence and the reasons for its occurrence should first be discussed.

## Domestic Violence: An Overview

There are numerous terms used to describe what is widely understood to be ‘domestic violence’ – combinations of physical, emotional, psychological and sexual abuse which occur in the domestic setting. Although the term itself does not imply who commits the act and who is the victim, it has generally become recognised as indicating abuse which is inflicted on women by men. It is for that reason that some prefer to use the terms ‘wife abuse’ or ‘wife-beating’ in order to point attention to the victims of the violence (Hague and Malos 1993). Nevertheless, ‘domestic violence’ is used in legislation and social work practice specifically for its non-gendered connotation.

Various theories have been put forward to explain why domestic violence occurs, and although there are too many to mention in detail here, I will highlight several of those that I feel have been most prevalent. For instance, abuse of power and control have been viewed as key factors, to which Finkelhor argues that abuse tends to “gravitate towards relationships of *greatest power differential*” (1983: 18 – author’s emphasis). Bersani and Chen (1988) also note that male-female power is one of the most important forces for determining violence. If a man feels the need for power in a relationship, he may use violence to achieve this, and if a woman accepts that he should have that power, she may accept the violence. However, a study by Umberson et al (1998) has found that perpetrating acts of domestic violence is not necessarily associated with gaining personal control for either men or women. On the other hand, being the victim of violence was associated with a reduced sense of personal control, but only for women. Similar to the issue of power and control, Gelles (1983) presents an argument based on Exchange/Social Control theories in which he feels that “people hit and abuse other family members because they can” (157).

Socialisation and Social Learning theory have also been used to explain the use of violence. Bersani and Chen (1988) find force to be legitimised by socialisation, where people not only learn that force is real and powerful but that it is right and desirable. For example, when force and its threat are used to socialise children, it also teaches them how useful a tool force can be. Originally presented by Bandura, Social Learning theory is

considered by O'Leary (1988) to play a crucial role in spousal aggression. He argues that five major factors can be attributed to being abusive: violence in the family of origin, stress, relationship dissatisfaction, alcohol abuse and aggressive personality style. Others (Malone et al 1989) have argued against the notion of aggression being determined by one's family of origin (also referred to as 'transgeneration transmission') in that it could lead individuals from physically aggressive homes to believe that they are already programmed to exhibit aggressive behaviour. Although Cook (1997) finds relevance in considering the family of origin, he sees that individuals have a conscious choice in whether or not to act violently towards their partners.

Taking this information, together with the aforementioned discussion on gender, it is now possible to focus on domestic violence from the perspective of both sexes. As it has been a common understanding that violence against women is the most prevalent form of domestic violence, I will begin there.

## **Abused Women/Violent Men: Majority Rules**

For the purpose of this dissertation, it is not my intention to present an in-depth look at all aspects of domestic violence suffered by women, however, I will highlight a few central issues that will have significance in the subsequent discussion on abused men.

### **Studies, Surveys and Statistics (part I)**

A recent study was conducted by the Scottish Executive (2000) regarding incidents of domestic abuse recorded by police in Scotland from April to December 1999. From the details on 26,000 incidents returned by the police, victims were female in 93 per cent of incidents of domestic abuse where the sex of the victim was recorded. Equivalently, 93 per cent of the perpetrators were male. This study provides similar results to a number of other studies and surveys that find women to be victims 90 to 95 per cent of the time.

### **'Battered Women's Syndrome'**

An American feminist, Lenore Walker, has developed what she refers to as the 'battered woman syndrome' to explain what happens to women who consistently suffer from domestic violence. Her theory is based upon the concept of 'learned helplessness' in which a woman is beaten down emotionally and physically over time, thereby becoming more passive and powerless and learning that there is nothing that can be done to prevent the violence. This syndrome has been used as a defence for women who have eventually 'snapped' and killed their husbands after years of abuse (Hague and Malos 1993).

### **The Refuge Movement**

In Chiswick, England, Erin Pizzey founded the first modern battered women's shelter in UK, and in the 25 years since then, the contributions of the refuge movement have been fundamental in bringing the issue of domestic violence out into the open, providing networks of refuges and other services for abused women and their children (Hague and Malos 1998). Straus et al (1980) note that the political drive initiated by Pizzey coincided with the National Organization of Women's (NOW) decision to make

battered wives a priority issue in the United States. In 1976, women's groups across the US began a political effort to establish better social services for abused women and to force changes in relevant legal statutes. In the UK today, women's refuges are typically associated with Women's Aid federations of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales, and any refuge that opens is immediately full. It is most often the case that women are turned away because there is no room for them and their children (Mullender 1996). As local government funding is under continuous pressure and budget cuts are regular and often inevitable, Pryke and Thomas (1998) point out that women representing the refuge movement must be vigilant in their efforts to keep the interests of the refuges to the forefront.

Of course, it is impossible to deny the widespread existence of violence against women, but a true picture of 'domestic violence' cannot be visualised unless the extent of abuse suffered by men is also recognised.

## Abused Men/Violent Women: Myth or Reality?

The old stereotype of a husband getting a plate thrown at him or being hit over the head with a rolling pin or frying pan is all too true. (Cook 1997: 19)

### Studies, Surveys and Statistics (part II)

Although numerous research studies and surveys have pointed to the accepted prevalence of male-to-female violence, a significant number have actually found a proportionately equal number of male and female victims of domestic violence (Mirrlees-Black 1999; Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz 1975). Some have even shown that women can often be more violent than men. Below are just a few of these.

#### Home Office Study 191

Presented in 1999 (Mirrlees-Black), this particular government study conducted by the Home Office provided somewhat 'shocking' results about domestic violence within the UK. Most remarkable was the statistic that 4.2% of *both men and women* claimed they had been assaulted by a current or former partner within the twelve months previous to the survey. Based on these findings, a 'best estimate' of domestic violence incidents in 1995 were 3.29 million women and 3.25 million men, unarguably similar and deeply concerning.

Interestingly, most male respondents did not consider abuse committed against them to be a criminal act. Of the males who noted intermittent abuse from their spouses, 80 per cent classified the acts as 'just something that happens' whilst only one per cent said it was a 'crime'.

[Victims] of domestic violence can be reluctant to pursue cases against their partners, for whatever reason, and this reluctance may manifest itself in a failure to see relevant acts as crimes. The assessment by the victim that an incident is not a 'crime' does not, then, necessarily imply that no harm was inflicted, or indeed, that no crime has been committed. (Mirrlees-Black 1999: 48)

This information may provide an insight into the significant lack of male victims in studies based on Police Incidence Reports, as well as why the issue of abused men has not come to the attention of the police.

Although men claimed to have levels of domestic violence that were the same as women, it was noted that they were less often injured, less likely to seek medical help, as well as less upset by their experience and considerably less frightened. The possible explanations given for these results were that men were more willing than women to report 'trivial' incidents; outcomes of assault are generally less serious for men, due to size and strength; and male victims are more embarrassed, therefore less likely to admit the seriousness of assaults.

#### Steinmetz, Straus, Gelles

Based on research in 1977, Steinmetz introduced the idea of the 'battered husband syndrome' which led to a swarm of media attention and even several death threats. Although her sample consisted of only fifty-seven randomly-selected families in Delaware, her results brought the problem to the attention of a global audience (Cook 1997).

The seminal research conducted in 1975 of domestic violence by Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz, presented in their book *Behind Closed Doors: Violence in the American Family* (1980), found that the rate of wife-to-husband violence was very similar to that of husband-to-wife violence. The level and incidence of violence was measured using a version of the "Conflict Tactics Scales" (CTS), a series of questions concerning the means to which conflicts are resolved. The eighteen items in the CTS can be grouped into three distinct methods of resolution: rational discussion, verbal or non-verbal aggression and physical force or violence. Of the 2,143 families recognised in their sample (comprised of 960 men and 1,184 women), 12.1 per cent of the husbands and 11.6 per cent of the wives claimed to have carried out at least one violent act on their spouse within the previous year. Further to this, respondents' data measured against the researchers' CTS found that 3.8 per cent of the women were considered 'beaten' while

men had a higher figure of 4.6 per cent. An extrapolation from these results produced a figure of two million men in the US who were suffering from domestic violence at the time (Straus et al 1980). A replication of the study by Straus and Gelles (1986) a decade later also found similar rates of abuse between both men and women. Although husband-to-wife violence appeared to decrease slightly, the rate of wife-to-husband abuse was almost the same as had been previously discovered.

These researchers have acknowledged that their work may be used to defend male violence, could minimise the need for battered women shelters, and has even been used against battered women in court cases, but they feel that the cost of denial and suppression of their results was even greater. “Rather than attempting to deny the existence of such violence [...], a more productive solution is to confront the issue and attempt to eliminate violence by women” (1986: 471).

Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz are generally considered to have conducted some of the most important research in family violence, however, there have been numerous opponents to their results and methods used, particularly concerning the CTS which ignores the context and motives of violent persons (Schwartz and DeKeserdy 1993).

## Other Studies

In 1994, a domestic violence study (Carrado et al) was conducted in Great Britain using a variation of the CTS. From their sample of 1,978 heterosexual men and women, considered to be a valid representation of UK adults, 13 and 18 per cent of women and men, respectively, were found to have experienced an assault from a partner when considering all previous relationships. Five and 11 per cent of women and men had experienced an assault from their current partner. Their results lead them to conclude that young, single women were more prone to experiencing domestic abuse, while men were most likely to be assaulted if they were married or cohabitating with a female partner and living in the southern part of the United Kingdom.

Another study (Smith et al 1992), based on 297 domestic violence victims admitted to the Accident and Emergency Department of the Leicester Royal Infirmary in 1988, found equal numbers of women and men assaulted in their homes. However, the men received more serious injuries than women, lost consciousness more often and required admission to hospital on more occasions.

An analysis of physical aggression towards spouses (Malone et al 1989) assessed 328 couples 6 weeks prior to marriage and 6 and 18 months after marriage. Overall, the women from the study sample reported more aggression towards their partners than did the men. Furthermore, it was noted that over the early course of the marriage, women's past experiences with aggression appeared to become increasingly generalised towards their partners, whilst men's experience with aggression outside the marriage became increasingly irrelevant.

A Glasgow University study on violence, conducted over two years, questioned 800 girls across Scotland aged 13-16 and discovered that over 70 per cent considered violence to be a 'normal and unremarkable' event of their everyday lives. Ten per cent of the girls described themselves as violent, and the same number reported that they had taken part in physical attacks (Moore 2000).

Another study worth noting, conducted by Fiebert and Gonzalez in 1997, involved 978 female college women in which 29 per cent admitted to initiating assaults against their male partners within the previous five years. It was also found that younger women in the 20's were significantly more likely to be physically aggressive than women who were 30 years and older. When asked for the reasoning behind the acts of violence, typical responses were related to wanting to engage their partner's attention and the belief that the victims would not be seriously injured or would not retaliate (Hoff 1999).

Only just recently, yet another study has been published in Ireland by the Marriage and Relationship Counseling Service (O'Morain 2001), claiming that of those couples who seek counseling from the MRCS, about half are involved in relationships in

which domestic violence occurs. Of that number, a quarter of the abuse was perpetrated by men against women, a third involved mutual abuse, whilst the remaining 41 per cent involved male victims and female perpetrators.

## The Problem with Gender Stereotypes

Most arguments against the prevalence of abused men and violent women seem to centre upon the socially constructed ‘norm’ of masculine, dominant men and feminine, submissive women. Although no one is likely to claim that cases of wife-to-husband violence do not exist *at all*, there appears to be a difficulty in acknowledging that women can actually be capable of violence on their own accord. For example, Barnett and LaViolette claim that “violence perpetrated by women is more likely a reflection of what is done to them rather than a stable personality trait” (1993: 60). Surely, although this argument may be valid in some instances, it is difficult to apply it towards all acts of domestic violence committed by women, especially when considering the aforementioned study by Fiebert and Gonzalez. Others argue that the recognition of violent women is merely a patriarchal backlash to a feminist issue, as noted by Hague and Malos:

One has to ask what this fuss about women’s supposed violence towards men is all about. Is it because in a society still controlled by men there is an almost automatic collusion to minimize the violence and damage and injury that men do to women? Is it about blaming and victimizing still further women who are already on the receiving end of violent abuse and degradation? (1993: 17)

## Women Can’t Truly Be Violent... Or Can They?

When Erin Pizzey founded the first battered women’s shelter, she found that 62 of the first 100 women who came to the shelter were equally or more violent than the partners they had escaped from. Although once considered a bastion of the feminist cause, she has since been excommunicated due to her views that abused women tend to bring violence upon themselves or are sometimes even addicted to abusive relationships (Cook 1997). In her work with women in the field of domestic violence, Pizzey has witnessed women who she describes as ‘family terrorists’ and feels that there seems to be “a blanket of silence over the huge figures of violence expressed by women” (1997: 1).

Detective Inspector Sylvia Aston, Force Liaison Officer and policy advisor for rape/sex offences, domestic violence and child abuse for the West Midlands Police, further confirms the violence perpetrated by women:

‘Some of the most violent people I’ve dealt with as an officer are women, and if you don’t judge a woman by her crime, but by her gender, then not only do you perpetuate the old, misleading stereotypes but you risk such offences recurring, perhaps in another relationship. Domestic violence as we see it is not a women’s issue – it’s a social issue.’ (Kirsta 1994: 229-230)

This prevailing stereotype of women as inherently non-violent is described by Patricia Pearson (1997) as “one of the most abiding myths of our time” (7). In her book, *When She Was Bad: How women get away with murder*, Pearson focuses solely on the problem of female aggression, drawing upon various examples and studies which she feels could be considered too alarmingly ‘anti-feminist’ to even suggest. However, she finds it necessary to bring attention to the problem in order for women to have access to adequate anger management counseling, child abuse prevention programs and other resources that are not available because of the inability to recognise a need. Straus and Gelles (1986) also note that violence by women was not an issue of public concern, as there had been no publicity and no funds had been invested in ameliorative programmes because it had not been defined as a problem. Although their 1975 study had been criticised for presenting statistics on violent wives, Straus and Gelles feel that discovering little change in the rate of assaults by women on their male partners in 1985 was consistent with the absence of available treatment programmes.

### A Concern Over Acknowledgement

Why is it particularly difficult to acknowledge that women can be as violent as men? In the case of domestic violence, the ‘self-defence’ argument used by women could be downplayed or questioned. As Orme (1994) and others have argued, women’s actions are merely rooted in a feeling of incapacity and helplessness rather than an exercise of power, and women who lash out with physical violence have resorted to doing so after prolonged abuse from a male partner. Further to this, Mullender (1996) argues that serious violence is what men inflict on women and each other, including

sustained severe abuse and emotional torture. Of the relatively large amount of literature which attempts to disclaim the findings, Straus (1996) contends that most of these efforts fall into one of three categories: criticism of the Conflict Tactics Scales, criticism of the authors of such studies for ignoring the sexist structure of society, and implicitly excusing violence by women by arguing that that it must be understood in the context of male oppression.

Pearson (1997), however, points out that an assumption is typically made that a violent woman “couldn’t have *wanted*, deliberately, to cause harm” (42 – author’s emphasis). If this woman says that she was coerced, abused or insane, then it is assumed that she most likely was. Pearson also stresses that refusing to admit that heterosexual women can be violent “[leaves] the gay community by itself out on a limb, vulnerable to further slander by self-appointed keepers of public morals... forcing lesbians to appear as the only ones who abuse” (131).

Based on preliminary studies regarding the prevalence of abuse among gay and lesbian relationships, Elliott (1996) argues that the phenomenon of same-sex domestic violence illustrates that routine, intentional intimidation through abusive acts and words is not a gender issue, but a power issue. A certain number of people, given the opportunity to get away with abusing their partners, will do so because they “hunger for control over some part of their lives, lives over which they have no control” (3).

Proponents of the women’s refuge movement may be unlikely to admit that women are violent and that men could be in need as well. Being that budgets are already extremely tight, and thousands of women are being turned away due to a lack of resources, it would prove to be even more difficult if government funding had to be rationed between both women’s and men’s refuges (Cook 1997).

Although Pagelow (1985) recognises that women can indeed be violent and even create an environment of fear and danger for their husbands, an argument is made against the concept of the ‘battered husband syndrome’ because it is not as large-scale and

serious as the problem of battered wives. However, Steinmetz and Lucca (1988) stress that ignoring the phenomenon of the battered husband not only denies the existence of this form of violence but also assumes that the physical injuries and psychological damage to both the victim and any children that witness these attacks are inconsequential.

## Why Don't Men Leave?

A common misconception is that men could leave their abusive partners more easily than women, due to not being “*physically or economically* restrained from walking out the front door and never returning if and when their wives become violent” (Pagelow 1985: 186 – author’s emphasis). Steinmetz and Lucca (1988) also recognise the prevalence of this assumption, but argue that it is based on erroneous sexist assumptions. Men with children have the added difficulty of having to fight for custody against their abusive wives (Cook 1997).

If men wish to seek help from abuse, where can they turn? Who will be sympathetic to their situation? Bates (1981) acknowledges that men may be unwilling to approach the police and other social agencies who are thought to deal only with abused women, therefore not take a man’s situation seriously or even disbelieve him. This reluctance to seek help is also noted by McFarlane et al (2000), recognising the expectations placed on gender roles:

As most police officers are male and many model traditional male attributes of physical strength and dominance, it is easy to understand an abused man’s reluctance to seek help and risk potential ridicule from those who provide assistance and protection. In similar fashion, most emergency room physicians have traditionally been male. Perhaps, social stereotypes account for the significantly lower number of abused men using criminal justice and emergency medical care. (166)

A more sinister notion presented by Pearson (1997) is that some abusive women could take advantage of the knowledge that police have been trained to disavow misogynistic attitudes and often take the word of a woman over a man. In any case, both men and women have difficulties in leaving an abusive relationship.

Although a need for support exists for both female and male victims of domestic violence, the question remains as to what resources and services are currently available and what should be made available, particularly for men.

## Current Response to Domestic Violence

### What's being done?

With their Zero Tolerance campaign in 1992/93, Edinburgh District Council was one of the first local governments in Britain to use widespread public education to confront domestic violence using posters and billboards. During the campaign, agency responses as well as public attitudes were challenged (Mullender 1996).

In January 1999, the UK government launched the 'Break the Chain' campaign against domestic violence by distributing information leaflets that provided information on recognising domestic violence and seeking help from it. Included were telephone numbers for various organisations such as Women's Aid, Shelterline and Men's Advice Line and Enquiries (MALE). There were also tips on seeking legal protection and taking the step to move away from the abuser. Further to this, in 1999, the country's first domestic violence court was established in Leeds, running one afternoon each week with the aim of dealing with approximately 400 cases per year. The role of social worker is to be essentially the same as in any other courtroom setting, but the Leeds staff have been given additional training (White 1999).

In conjunction with the criminal justice system, groupwork programmes have been developed within the last decade to provide therapeutic work with abusive men, one being the CHANGE Project, based in Stirling. Pryke and Thomas (1998) note that although it is too early to recognise which programmes are obviously successful – including the Derby IMPACT Project, the West Yorkshire Scheme and the Kirklees MAN Project – there has been an emerging consensus about some features of effective provision, such as vigorously challenging and analysing a man's behaviour, rationalisation and defence mechanisms.

Most recently, in November 2000 the Scottish Executive published a *National Strategy to Address Domestic Abuse in Scotland*. The Strategy, produced by the Scottish Partnership on Domestic Abuse, contains an Action Plan which sets out clearly what

should be accomplished over the next 3 years by national and local government, public bodies and voluntary organisations. In February 2001, a conference was held in Edinburgh, with the aim of bringing together those responsible for implementing the Action Plan to exchange views and discuss the way forward. Ninety-four delegates attended from all over Scotland (Scottish Executive, 2001).

On the day the National Strategy was launched, 29 November last year, the First Minister announced the largest ever domestic abuse funding package in the UK, £18.3m. £10m over three years has been allocated to the provision of more refuge spaces, with the goal of having a space available for every woman and child who needs one by 2004. £3m is available for the continuation of the Domestic Abuse Service Development Fund for a further two years. In addition, there is £4.5m over three years to take forward the work in the Action Plan and £818,000 during this financial year for Women's Aid groups to improve access to offices and refuges, provide information in community languages, produce a new leaflet for children and young people and supply training packs.

### What's not being done? ...criticised?

When Pryke and Thomas (1998) conducted a survey of local authority social service and social work departments in the UK, they found that only 37 of 156, *just 24 per cent*, had developed meaningful policies in relation to domestic violence, even though it is considered that significant progress has been made over the last two decades. Mullender (1996) points out several criticisms about the social work response to abused women: failure to identify abuse, ignoring the woman as a person in her own right, being interested only in the children, and blaming the victim. Other issues recognised by Mullender include: a failure to work with or confront the man, not knowing how to respond to Black women, failure to provide the woman with effective help, and even making the woman feel worse.

Although Mullender recognises that the elements of anti-racism and anti-oppressive measures for disabled women should be addressed, there is no mention of the

anti-sexist need for addressing men who are abused or women who are abusive. Not surprisingly, Home Office Research Study 191 found that:

Male victims of domestic violence are particularly unhappy about the level of support offered by agencies, especially the police. It may be 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. (Mirrlees-Black 1999: 63)

It is important to consider that many of the same criticisms and concerns are likely to be shared by both women and men who are seeking help from an abusive relationship. For instance, Hague and Malos (1993) stress that the power which local authority social services departments have in recommending the removal of children from their parents does act as a strong deterrent from women confiding in them. For men, this situation could be seen as having to choose between the possibilities of either losing their children or having them remain with an abusive mother. As there are no refuges for men, it is not only detrimental to the victim but also the children that may be involved.

Although refuges, Women's Aid and telephone advice lines often exist locally to offer support for abused women, there was only *one* telephone support line recently available for men in the whole of the UK, Men's Advice Line and Enquiries (MALE). I say 'was' because this service folded in March of 2001, after several years of providing much needed assistance for abused men. When it existed, MALE was funded by voluntary contributions only, and was run single-handedly by Les Davidson, who received roughly 8000 calls and 200 letters per year (2000, personal correspondence). Because there are currently no support programmes exclusively for abusive women, outside of correctional institutions, Davidson also received a considerable number of phone calls from violent women who were seeking help and did not know where to turn. Since the help-line has closed, I have not been able to re-contact Davidson, however, I have heard from a reliable source that he had become disenchanted with the cause. Due to the lack of acknowledgement and support from the government and the general public, as he had previously discussed with me, I can understand how a person can give up hope and become somewhat bitter or jaded. Nevertheless, when I corresponded with him in

October 2000, he was extremely helpful, explaining how he had helped other students with dissertations and papers on this topic, and he was more than willing to share his experiences and knowledge.

Davidson pointed out several examples of the difficulties he often faced, which I found terribly disheartening. For example, whenever he attempted to speak to MP's about his service, many of them showed an interest in the topic but did not wish to help, for fear of appearing unsympathetic to the women of their respective constituencies. As Davidson noted, the issue "is a political hot potato". He also claimed that some MP's did not even want to be seen speaking to him! Further to this, another slap in the face occurred with, of all things, the government-funded domestic violence awareness campaign 'Break the Chain', previously discussed. Although the information leaflets were to help combat the problem across the UK, Davidson told me that he struggled to get the MALE help-line included as an available resource. After this, MALE decided to withdraw from the programme in February 2000, once the Home Office published comments from certain studies claiming that women fight back only because they are provoked by violent men or are defending themselves. Understandably, Davidson did not wish to be associated with something that undermined everything his service stood for, yet it is truly sad that male victims were the ones who actually lost out. However, an abused men advice service, Amen, does exist in the Republic of Ireland and can help fill the gap created by the loss of the MALE help-line in the UK. What separates Amen from MALE is that the coordinator, Mary Cleary, operates a truly informative web site and can be contacted via e-mail, which is not only more cost-effective for victims but also more accessible and discrete than a long distance telephone call.

Why is it that a national service such as Amen does not exist within the UK? It appears that this problematic – and very real – issue has not yet been taken seriously at the highest levels of government. For instance, during the Open Forum session of the *National Strategy to Address Domestic Abuse in Scotland*, a query was raised about the proposed research into abused men, which was the only mention about the issue within the briefing document (Scottish Executive 2001). The response was incredibly dismissive and almost patronising, particularly regarding work such as this dissertation.

Care needed to be taken with the questions to ensure a proper picture. Some men may be subject to retaliation from women they have abused. Care should also be taken as to whom should be given the contract. Academics may not have a proper knowledge of the issue. The Minister promised a tight specification and monitoring. (14-15)

It is somewhat concerning that this directive is the driving force behind the current and future response to domestic violence across Scotland, being that there is such a negative attitude towards the idea that men can also suffer abuse.

## **Interviews and Key Findings**

To provide a more well-rounded account of the various responses to domestic violence, it was necessary to not only target the individual sphere of social work, but to also include various other agencies, public services and voluntary organisations. The intent is to highlight where an overlap of services, if any, currently exists or could be developed within a multi-agency solution, as well as to discover where social work intervention appears to be lacking. Beyond this, I used these interviews to gauge the general attitudes and experiences of practitioners, professionals and service providers, in order to support or refute the numerous research studies and statistics already presented. Particular quotes from some interviews have been presented verbatim, not only to stress their importance within this discussion but also to emphasise the gravity (or ‘shock value’) of the information I received.

### **Lothian & Borders Police**

Following on from the Zero Tolerance campaign, Domestic Violence Liaison Officers were introduced within the Lothian & Borders region in 1996, as it was recognised that police needed to effectively change their procedures in handling the problem on a local level. As is currently stands, there is one police officer in this role for each of the six divisions in the force, which is a short-term post lasting a maximum of three years. A Liaison Officer ensures that domestic violence incidents, which are recorded in a central computer database, are all dealt with properly and that contact is made with as many victims as possible. I was able to speak with Officer Alison Porter, who provided me with information about her role and her direct involvement with victims of abuse. As is often the case with many other organisations or services, time and resources prove to be a constant difficulty. Generally, Domestic Violence Liaison Officers do prioritise in terms of those individuals whose partners have gone to court, ensuring that these individuals are always contacted. They also make a point of contacting repeat victims – people who have come to the attention of the police more than once, and then “work [their] way down a list”.

*It really depends on how busy you are, what kind of week you're having. Sometimes you can contact people who have contacted the police for the first time, and that can be extremely useful for them, but it really just depends on how busy we are.*

A Liaison Office does not take part in any criminal investigations, nor do they attend the initial incident. The uniformed officers will go out on calls, and the Liaison Officers are informed via computer as to what happened and who was involved, as well as if there are any children in the household. It is then the Liaison Officer's job to record all of the relevant information, which can be extremely useful for various agencies, such as social work, if they have a concern for any children who may be affected. Furthermore, this information is vital for lawyers who are trying to obtain an interdict against the abusive partner.

*A lot of my work is paperwork, but I do make contact with victims. Generally I would describe the victim as a woman – because generally that is what I tend to work with 95% of the time. My work is with women.*

Porter contacts victims whose partners have been to court to let them know what happened at court, such as if there were any conditions put on their partner. She also offers victims the chance to chat with her, if necessary, to discuss their legal rights – what they can do as far as a lawyer is concerned, what a lawyer can do for them, what their rights are in regards to their children, what the police can do to help them and what other agencies are around to provide assistance.

*Very often, it's the first time a woman has opened up about what's going on in the house. She uses it as an opportunity to get everything off her chest, which is fine, but I must reiterate that we are not counselors, but we can listen and we're quite good listeners.*

When I asked about the incident level of male victims, I received the response I had expected. As mentioned previously (Mirrlees-Black 1999; Bates 1981), men are less likely than women to report domestic violence to the police, for fear of not being believed or inadvertently receiving false accusations of being the abuser themselves, and I kept this in mind throughout our discussion.

*I wouldn't say there are loads [of cases], I would say there's certainly a substantial number to cause concern. The men I have met who have been abused by women stay for the same reasons as women stay: they love their partner and just want their behaviour to change, and they don't want to leave their children.*

Porter finds that because abused men may not be naturally violent, it is difficult for people to understand why they do not simply retaliate when there is certainly a “good chance” that they would be able to beat their partner. She went on to agree with the misunderstood argument that it is much easier, in some respects, for men to leave because they are usually the main breadwinners. She also felt that men typically have less serious injuries than women, possibly because women cannot inflict injuries in the same way.

*I'm not disputing that, yes, there are violent women out there and there are abusive women. I think there's a lot of emotional abuse that tends to go on more than the physical stuff. Anyone you meet who has suffered domestic abuse will tell you that emotional abuse is worse than the physical.*

## Edinburgh Women's Aid

I was able to speak with Fiona O'Reilly, a representative from Edinburgh Women's Aid who had been in attendance at this year's *National Strategy to Address Domestic Abuse in Scotland* mentioned above. O'Reilly informed me that the £818,000 offered to Women's Aid through the Strategy, along with the continued support from the Zero Tolerance campaign had a significant positive impact on their services. Beyond improving refuges and offices, it also allowed for the increased use of IT aids and training materials for schools and other organisations or groups.

O'Reilly noted that not many lesbians use their service, but she stated that “abuse is abuse” and should be dealt with appropriately, as far as she was concerned. I pointed out the argument that services for abused men have been viewed as competition for public funds and resources, then asked if these services could be taken as a “slap in the face” to the problem of abused women. O'Reilly felt that there *should* be more services for men, especially if the problem is becoming “as prevalent as you say”, which led me to question the sincerity of her reply. Upon enquiring about advice or support for violent

women, I was informed that, to O'Reilly's knowledge, no women contact Women's Aid regarding this issue.

## Lothian Gay & Lesbian Switchboard

In the past six months prior to interviewing two representatives from the organisation (the period between late 2000 and early 2001), six women had contacted the switchboard regarding domestic violence issues, in which two had been perpetrators. Regarding the comment by Pearson (1998) that the failure to admit that heterosexual women can be violent only places more emphasis on lesbians who abuse, it was felt by the representatives that the "butch/femme" concept merely took away from the crux of the issue. Surprisingly, as far as the switchboard were aware, there are no domestic awareness campaigns that are specific to lesbians within the UK. However, the particular representatives I interviewed had received formal training on the subject.

## Cowgate Centre

In Edinburgh, there are currently no specific services or organisations for men who suffer from domestic abuse. Nevertheless, there are certainly individuals who have become involved in the issue due to the nature of their work, such as Ian Wright, an experienced RCO and manager of the Cowgate Centre, which provides assistance and support for the homeless. I visited Wright at the Centre, and he explained to me how he was introduced to the problems faced by abused men:

*I had a guy turn up one day and say, 'I am homeless, as of this afternoon, and I've suffered domestic violence'. He was sat there, covered in bruises and cuts – cuts on his arms, cuts on his face – and he was actively suicidal. He had a plan. He was going to leave the building and carry out the plan.*

As Wright had never dealt with this type of problem before, he turned to the only service he knew of for domestic violence support, Women's Aid.

*Well, I thought, let's do something practical [laughs] we'll ring Women's Aid [laughs]! They'll know! [big laugh]. Women's Aid, they were really, really cautious when on the phone. So, of course, I'm trying to say this is who I am, this is my title, you know, I've got an RN after my name, and I work in a recognised*

*centre. 'Oh no, I'm sorry. We really can't talk to you. We don't know anything about you, and we can't talk to you'. So, I'm like, 'Hold on! Don't go away!' [laughs] You know? 'You have to understand...' ...(all kinds of reasons, all kinds of excuses)... 'and we really can't speak to you' – and they put the phone down on me! And I'm there with the guy, and I'm like, 'They put the phone down on me!' [big laugh]*

Being that the man was now homeless, as he did not wish to return to his abusive wife in his West Lothian flat, Wright set about attempting to obtain temporary housing from Edinburgh City Council.

*...there was lots of stuff about sorting out the West Lothian tenancy, saying to Edinburgh Council, 'Well, he's here now and he's a victim of domestic violence, therefore, your domestic violence policy must allow him to be re-housed on a temporary basis.'*

*[So they do have a policy then?]*

*They do have a policy, but of course they went, 'Oh no, sorry, we don't do men.' [laughs] 'We deal with domestic violence, but it doesn't happen to men.'*

*[That's quite interesting because it seems that most policies tend to be non-gendered, yet, in practice, they attach a gender to it.]*

*Yes. Well, we didn't want to press the issue, but initially it was a case of 'No that can't be, that can't be.' So, they put him in temporary accommodation here, which was really useful because it meant he had a base, and it put some distance between him and his partner.*

Although the man was able to 'escape' from his wife's abuse on many occasions, he usually went back to her. When I asked Wright why he thought this occurred, he said:

*Because he's in love! [laughs] There was a child involved, his child and hers. He's in love, and he wants to make it work. And believe me, women say the exactly the same as men do. They say, 'I won't do it anymore... I'm sorry... It's not you, it's me... It'll be different next time...' etc. All those excuses that are stereotypical of a male abuser, but women say exactly the same things.*

Wright went on to note that he felt both men and women must surely experience the same types of abuse – physical, emotional and psychological – as well as feelings of absolute fear, based on the stories from men he has come into contact with.

*I've got a scenario for you. I met this guy for a coffee because he managed to get out of the house. He said that he suffered [domestic abuse] for 25 years. Every night he would come home from work, and he always wore a padded jacket in case his wife goes for him with a knife. Now, you can't tell me that that's not the same as a woman, not the same feeling. [...] This particular guy is in fear of his life. He said, 'I would sit on the stairs with a thick coat on, waiting for her to go to sleep because, if I don't and I go to bed before her, chances are she'll come through the door and... (we're not just talking a kitchen knife)... and I am frightened to go to bed. I am fearful.' Having heard that, you think, 'Well, how could anyone live like that?' [...] He was in love with his wife. And again, it was always a case of afterwards, 'Oh, I do love you... It'll be better next time... I won't do it again... I promise to get some help' – which is all the stuff that women experience.*

Before Wright could understand what was happening, he was effectively becoming a support service for abused men in Edinburgh, as well as media spokesperson for the issue. It all started with a simple telephone call. Wright explained that there was a phone-in on a local radio station, and at lunchtime anyone could phone in, so the man mentioned above decided to call from the centre, albeit with a great deal of anxiety and nervousness. The man did eventually get through, the radio presenter asked him some questions, and they took some more calls.

*It was just fantastic because that was part of his own work. He was broadening people's experience of domestic violence.*

From that one radio broadcast, media interest mushroomed, and both men were interviewed by the Edinburgh Evening News, The Herald, The Scotsman, and the Daily Record between late 1999 and early 2000. Through this exposure, Wright was contacted by a number of men seeking assistance and advice, along with a couple from Edinburgh who were eagerly looking for some form of help, as the woman admitted to have repeatedly “beaten up” her male partner over a long period of time. Wright was then approached by BBC local radio, who were hoping to broadcast a phone-in programme from the centre, to which he agreed.

*They had the Assistant Chief Constable of Strathclyde on saying: 'We have changed. The policy has changed. When we attend a domestic scene now, we do not just dismiss that the male partner has been the victim of the female partner.' That's not quite true – that's certainly not been the experiences of my clients. I have one client with an experience where he called the police and they came and*

*the partner sat there, not a mark on her, and my client sat there covered in blood, and the police said to him: 'You are leaving, and you're leaving now, and if you don't leave, we'll make you.' He just said, 'Look at me!'*

Overall, Wright felt that the programme went extremely well, and he was surprised when Women's Aid contacted him shortly thereafter to apologise for their rather unhelpful initial reaction. They then asked if he would be willing to accept referrals from abused men who contacted Women's Aid.

Since then, Wright has become a point of contact for abused men in the Edinburgh and Lothian region, who are referred by various sources. (It was actually Women's Aid who informed me of him, when I phoned to ask about their policies.) Over the past couple of years, Wright has tried to put together a support group for men, but it only lasted for a couple of months. Although men were keen about the idea, Wright felt that it is not in men's nature to openly discuss their problems, particularly a problem such as this, with other men.

## Amen

Society does not have the right to discriminate against victims of domestic violence because of their gender. (Amen's slogan)

Founded in December 1997 by Mary Cleary in Navan, Republic of Ireland, Amen is a small – but effective – voluntary service which provides support and information for male victims of domestic abuse. Since its inception, Amen has been contacted by over 10,000 men and their children or other family members. As the organisation's briefing document states, "callers to Amen come from all walks of life, every social stratum, all age groups and from every part of Ireland". Amen volunteers provide information to the men who ring their confidential help-line on the legal remedies available to them, assist the men in making decisions on the options that are open to them, as well as refer the men to counselors and therapists. Further to those men who contact the service directly, referrals also come from a number of different sources such as social workers, doctors, employers, Women's Aid and Samaritans. In addition to the support service, Amen volunteers also work to increase public awareness of male victims of abuse through

media interviews, giving talks to schools, libraries, health boards, social workers and various other outlets and organisations.

I had been informed about Amen by Ian Wright at the Cowgate Centre in Edinburgh, who found Cleary to be a considerable support, particularly in light of no similar service being available within the UK. Not only did Cleary grant me an insightful telephone interview, but she also provided me with a number of useful reports and articles regarding her service and the issue of abused men in general. Cleary gave the impression of being a woman who was more than willing to share information and experiences, in an effort to increase awareness about this 'hidden' social problem. Several points she raised in the course of the interview showed her level of dedication to the cause. For example, for the first year and a half that the service existed, it was run single-handedly by Cleary from home. In effect, the help-line was simply her home phone number, which she claims led her to "feel like a prisoner" to some degree, as she was bombarded by an incredible number of phone calls from men who had previously suffered silently and alone in abusive relationships. Although Amen is not a men's shelter, Cleary often finds herself offering refuge for men in her own home when other accommodation is not available or in emergency situations.

After the first year, Cleary organised the first world conference on abused men, held at University College in Dublin. Although met with some controversy, it was considered to be a major success and a significant step towards increased recognition, partly due to the media interest that the conference received. Following the event, Cleary began to receive requests to speak across Ireland and the world, which she has been more than willing to perform. When I conducted the interview, she had just returned from a speaking engagement at a university in the United States. When asked if she was a more 'acceptable' spokesperson for abused men (particularly in the media) because she was herself a woman, Cleary wholeheartedly agreed that this was so. However, she feels that she receives the same response as men would from organisations such as Women's Aid, who she states "don't want us to sit at their table", although they are willing to use Amen as a service for referrals.

At present, Cleary is continuing her effort to raise awareness and to receive more funding from local groups and health boards across Ireland. She also hopes to create a post for a National Development Worker to assist with the problem across Ireland, along with employing IT professionals to provide much needed support.

## Social Work

I spoke with Kate Cavanagh, a Glasgow University Social Work lecturer, who has previous experience as a practitioner and a particular academic interest in this issue. When asked whether or not social work should be involved in domestic violence, she responded:

*Well, yes, for the same reasons that we're involved in violence against children... because it's a serious social problem, because of the impact of experiences. We are a profession who is in the business of, however you might phrase it, 'helping people' who are discriminated against and are victimised or vulnerable. All these reasons would suggest to me that social work certainly has a role to play in relation to domestic violence.*

Cavanagh explained that she saw the role of social work as being involved in the creation of policies on the matter and identifying effective practices that definitely exist within social work at present. As social workers are heavily involved in working with families, issues of domestic violence are going to present themselves, therefore, she feels that the problem is being addressed.

*If you look at the whole thing politically, what has actually happened is that social work has been reluctant to intervene in domestic violence. Organisations like Women's Aid have been hugely critical. Many famous practitioners, researchers, activists have been very critical of social work's reluctance to become involved. So, what is that reluctance to become involved about? [...] It seems that current practice would suggest we're still not that involved and that we do not have policies. What I would say to you is that we certainly do have many more policies now in social work in relation to domestic violence than 10 years ago and certainly 20 years ago.*

*I think the other thing is that if I say to you 'There's much more going on', we could debate that, as some people are saying it's marginalised in terms of social work and practice. You have to take a historic perspective and understand that changes happen gradually.*

Although she agreed that domestic violence, as a whole, was a definite problem that warranted social work involvement, Cavanagh felt as though violence against women was the area of greatest concern.

*I think it's wrong to make generalisations. I think that there are men who are victims of violence from an intimate female partner. I know that there are men who are victims of violence from an intimate female partner because I've worked in these situations as a practitioner, and I think that something could be taken on board. However, I think that if you're looking to see that there are just as many men who are subjected to the victimisation, the terrorisation that women have, then I think we're talking about much, much lower numbers. I don't think that it's the same size of a social problem.*

A particular issue that I felt needed addressing was the general notion that the social work response to domestic violence was more about referrals than the provision of a one-to-one therapeutic service.

*There is a culture where we do refer onto other organisations or agencies, but the culture of 'referring on' is not that new, as social work has always done it. Some social workers would prefer not to do that and will and do work with an individual, but I think that this depends on whether or not that issue is given priority and whether or not there is a culture within a particular office or department that sees that this is legitimate work for social workers to be involved in. One of the big factors that I think is important is that often, if we don't provide a service as far as we are able, I think there is a whole issue around therapy because, I think, social workers do not think that they can provide a therapeutic service because they're not trained as therapists, and often we can use that as a way of not intervening because we don't think that we're skilled enough.*

An interesting point made by Cavanagh is that there is now in the academic literature a request that we as social workers actively engage with *men* more in families than we have done previously. In the past, social work contact has been typically focused on mothers, in relation to their children, therefore women's issues have been more easily recognised and acknowledged. If this interaction was expanded to include men, it is likely that they could be given the opportunity to speak out, possibly about problems such as abuse.

Following on from the comments presented by Cavanagh, I will now discuss the current and proposed roles and responsibilities of social work in respect to domestic violence. Although most – if not all – literature and research on this subject places focus solely on violence against women, it is necessary to present the information in that context, whilst attempting to highlight the need for ‘true’ non-gender-specific responses. Beyond this, one could argue that it is highly unlikely for services to develop for abused men if legislative and practice frameworks are not already in place to respond to abused women, who are generally viewed as the majority of domestic violence cases. As noted previously, both men and women are fighting the same battle: recognition of their abuse along with the ability to receive ample support.

## **Policy, Practice and Recommendations**

### **Inadequacies in the Social Work Response**

The Scottish Office Central Research Unit commissioned a piece of research which took place from October 1996 – October 1997 to examine current service provision to women experiencing domestic violence in Scotland (Henderson 1998). With the exception of the police, Housing Departments and Women's Aid, there was little evidence of a policy framework or operational guidance for service providers' involvement in domestic violence. Even where this was the case, there were definite variations in actual practice. Furthermore, there was found to be little evaluation and monitoring, statistic-gathering or joint-working, with few multi-agency groups and little evidence of area-based strategies. As Mullender (1997) notes, it has traditionally been argued that social services departments have no statutory responsibility for abused women, and this remains the case in primary legislation. Nevertheless, the way in which domestic violence is understood by social workers, Lloyd (1995) stresses, is critical in the response made to it both by agencies and individuals:

In general terms it appears that social workers' responses to domestic violence are determined by workers' own value systems... Their responses are also the result of adhering to stereotyped images of women who experience domestic violence and the beliefs of individual social workers about why it occurs. (159)

This notion had been shared in my discussion with Cavanagh above, in that there seems to be a 'hit or miss' type of response, depending on the particular practitioner or department that may be involved.

Mullender (1997) finds that social workers, lacking adequate guidance in their work with abused women, their children and their abusers, have often presented as not knowing how to respond or as having other priorities, typically child protection. She goes on to point out that while there are some social workers who have taken an interest in placing women's safety to the fore, according to abused women and women's activists, the overall picture of social services' responses has changed little over the period of

intense activity in other areas (Zero Tolerance campaigns, establishment of police domestic violence units, and so on).

If the problem of domestic violence can take so many differing forms, particularly *men* who are victims of abuse by *women*, services must be devised to cope with the complexity of such cases. In essence, argue Pryke and Thomas (1998), this is a further management task – to design duty and support services for sustaining people in crisis. An acknowledgement that the problem of domestic violence is one which social services has to cope with should trigger a review of the response to emergencies. As it currently stands, dilemmas still exist about which services social work departments will offer directly and which will be contracted out to other agencies in the voluntary sector. Sometimes, note Pryke and Thomas, these decisions are resource-driven – and sometimes influenced by historical factors – for example, where a voluntary organisation in an area has established a niche. What is important is that policy is established that clearly covers the essential tasks. Interestingly, they find that some authorities are clearly attracted to the idea of a role for assessing the needs of vulnerable adults – a kind of adult protection function to emulate many of the duties of child protection teams.

Social workers and care managers working with all user groups need a knowledge of domestic abuse and how to respond. We can no longer say that there is no statutory responsibility for domestic violence; it should be part of comprehensive assessment and intervention in all medical and welfare contexts, therefore, care planners at authority-wide and individual levels need to know about it (Mullender 1997). Clearly, before any considerable developments can be made, there must be sufficient domestic violence education across the whole of social work, even though I believe that this is already seen as a requirement not yet met.

## Education and Training

Given the uneven development of social work services to the problem of domestic violence in all its complexity, it is evident that staff training remains a considerable task.

A reasonable preliminary step would be to determine how much attention the issue receives on professional qualifying programmes; this is probably comparatively little. At post-qualifying levels the problem of domestic violence is so predominant that it would seem to warrant a course of its own; yet a brief examination of CCETSW's current directory of post-qualifying and advanced courses suggest that no course is on offer. On the face of it, the case for an urgent training initiative is very strong. (Pryke and Thomas 1998: 110)

It may be pertinent to note that throughout the two-year Master of Social Work course at Edinburgh University, there was *not even one* lecture in which domestic violence was discussed in any detail. This failure to address the problem can only have detrimental effects on practice, as a message is being indirectly sent to students that domestic violence is not an issue of any significant importance and does not warrant an appropriate social work response. In fact, I was cautioned about this choice of dissertation topic, as it was felt that there may not be an adequate amount of literature and research available to support my discussion. Although there is some truth to this, being that there *was* a considerable difficulty in uncovering available resources, I feel as though an issue such as abused men should be receiving more consideration within academic work, particularly when not included in the training curriculum.

Beyond merely educating individuals within social work about the many facets of abuse, there must also be a consideration of how the service *as a whole* can provide a more appropriate response. In the past few years, a stronger focus has been placed on social work in terms of its role within an inter-agency framework.

## The Multi-agency Solution

Exactly what does an inter-agency (also referred to as 'multi-agency') response to domestic violence entail? Apart from networking and exchanging information, inter-agency initiatives usually specialise in: monitoring domestic violence, identifying gaps in provision and attempting to fill these gaps; co-ordinating the work of member agencies and promoting good practice (e.g. developing domestic violence training, policies and practice guidance; educative and preventative initiatives, such as public awareness programmes and perpetrators projects (Hague 2000). In theory, central government encouragement of multi-agency work on domestic violence can be perceived as an

adequate response to this difficulty, and these initiatives have, indeed, led to innovations in domestic violence responses in many localities (Hague 1997). Nevertheless, one must leave room for speculation, as this way of thinking “forms part of a general trend towards viewing inter-agency collaboration as the panacea for all evils” (ibid.: 142).

Pryke and Thomas (1998) find that there are both advantages and disadvantages to inter-agency initiatives. They can create an extra layer of bureaucracy involving people in more, rather than fewer, meetings; they can reduce the autonomy of particular groups ‘for the greater good’, or they can stretch the limited resources of member organisations rather than enhance them. However, Mullender (1997) argues that membership of a multi-agency forum may be the best way in which a social services department can formulate policy and clarify its own role in conjunction with others, and also set in place processes for effective inter-agency liaison. This sentiment is also shared by Pryke and Thomas (1998), who add that social services should use their statutory powers and duties to initiate and support these responses.

Recent research has shown the need for careful consideration and planning in the development of a multi-agency initiative. For one, the Domestic Violence Research Group in the School for Policy Studies at the University of Bristol has completed a national study of inter-agency approaches to domestic violence (Hague and Malos 1998). From the research study reported here, it was clear that the development of multi-agency work on domestic violence will need to take on many issues, including ‘ownership’ of the inter-agency work done, equality of opportunity within the multi-agency project, the possible marginalization of the refuge movement and voluntary sector, and the involvement of those individuals who have experienced violence. The research provided evidence of the need for: support for domestic violence inter-agency work from senior managers and policy-makers; the inclusion of inter-agency activity into job specifications; officers to be delegated to represent their agency on domestic violence forums; a viable mixture of policy-makers and practitioners within the group; and ensuring that issues taken up in the forum were fed back into agency policy and practice.

On the whole, one could easily construe that if the current social work response towards the 'traditional' sense of domestic violence is considered inadequate, then it is no wonder that assistance for abused men and violent women is not readily available.

## Conclusion

The question of who is the ‘most important’ victim is a debate that serves only to detract from providing effective and helpful services, for both genders, that must have *changing behaviors* as their goal. (Cook 1997: 34, my emphasis)

The extent of violence suffered by both women and men should not be overlooked, as it encompasses a social dilemma that is not necessarily gender-specific. I am aware that there is a distinct shortage of resources currently available for women, therefore, I do not find it necessary or fair to remove what is already in existence for alleviating an unarguable problem. The issue of combating violence as a whole is based on providing additional assistance for both men and women who are victims. However, I feel that there is a need to recognise abused men and violent women, publicly and in practice, taking into consideration the fact that twenty-five years ago the figures for abused women were only a fraction of the number who claim to be suffering today.

As I have shown above, useful programmes and services are already in existence to help combat domestic violence, albeit fragmented and only somewhat interconnected. Even among what is currently available, there is a distinct lack of support for abused men. Although arguments related to a change in culture or ‘way of thinking’ are generally viewed as utopian – or at least difficult to manage and follow through – it has become clear that an adequate level of buy-in and acknowledgement must come into effect before social work can offer a suitable response to male victims of domestic abuse. Surely, this would need to be accomplished through ‘top-down’ government legislation and directives *along with* ‘bottom-up’ training of social workers at an individual level. Initiatives such as this year’s *National Strategy to Address Domestic Abuse in Scotland* are a step in the right direction to realising a true multi-agency response, ensuring representation and input from various local and national organisations. Nevertheless, if social work is to grasp the full scope of what we define as ‘domestic abuse’, male victims must not be disregarded.

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