

Domestic violence: Silent voices – the case of the male victim

Abstract

Gender is a powerful and complex process that impacts enormously on the phenomenon of domestic violence. This occurs more so for the male victim due to the feminisation of the identity of “victim”. When the judicial, legislative and law enforcement instruments are critiqued this feminisation is compounded. However, a crucial factor, implicit in the methodology of the researcher, is the choice of “instrumental measure” used to gather data. Crime victimisation studies and family conflict studies both measure assault but they do so from a different conceptualisation of violence. Hence both unearth differential rates of assault and use their findings to build theoretical debates on domestic violence, debates that are centred on a hierarchy of victim hood underscored by an issue of funding. Research data from both perspectives are, at present, hijacked by each other to bolster their position within the political, economic and social arenas. Both sets of data are reliable, however, there needs to be more dialogue and communication between both sides if the issue of domestic violence is to be addressed in relation to “preventative” measures being put in place and “support systems” set up for the most severe cases. It remains to be seen if this will occur. This situation creates a conflict amongst those involved, a conflict that results in a dual discourse surrounding domestic violence within which both sides claim validity of victim hood. Central to this is the binary “broad”/“narrow” perspective.

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Introduction

Within a society where there is a hierarchical order of social relations based on gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality, all of which are related to, and driven by, the purpose of upholding power in the hands of the powerful (Walby, 1986a), there will always be the marginalized, the powerless, the forgotten and the silent, all founded on the identity of being the “other”. Thus, society tends to be constructed on dominant “dualisms”.

The phenomenon under investigation and analysis in this paper is “violence in the home”, or as it is more widely named and described, “domestic violence”. In contemporary society it is widely recognised that domestic violence is an increasing issue for many “people”.¹ Further, it is pervasive throughout all regions of the world, although in different cultures it may express itself in diverse ways (Maynard and Winn, 1997). Furthermore, it cuts across class, ethnicity, sex and race (Lockhart, 1985 & 1991; Hampton, Carrillo & Kim, 1998; United Nations, 1994). Domestic violence could be researched from the perspective of a range of different groups – female (Dobash and Dobash, 1992), male (Adams, 1999), children (Hearn, 1990), lesbianism (Lobel, 1986), and gay men. Additionally, it could be researched from a varying amount of aspects of violence – physical, sexual, emotional (Kelleher and O’Connor, 1999); or, one could assess its effects, to health and well being– emotional or physical - or investigate its causes – pathological, individual (Bradshaw, 1996), group or structural (Byles, 1978; Martin, 1976; Dobash and Dobash, 1992). However, there have been criticisms that the research has an “ethnocentric” feel to it as most of the research centres on white western

¹ See for instance; Taylor and Chandler, 1985; Office of the Tainiste, 1997; Morgan and Fitzgerald, 1992; McHugh, Walsh and Casterkey, 1999; Kelleher and O’Connor, 1999; Dobash and Dobash, 1992; Davies, 1994; Adams, 1999; Cook, 1997; Carrado, George, Loxam, Jones & Templar, 1996; George, 1992 & 1994; Straus and Gelles, 1986 & 1988

middleclass females (Sarantakos, 1999); that is, there has been an “exclusionary” aspect to the research in relation to the presence of a “male victim” and a feminisation of the phenomenon.

Walker and Walker (1997: 8) define social exclusion as:

...the dynamic process of being shut out, fully or partially, from any of the social, economic, political or cultural systems which determine the social integration of a person in society. Social exclusion may therefore be seen as the denial (or non-realisation) of the civil, political and social rights of citizenship.

Thus, the essence of social exclusion can centre on the lack of, or denial of access to, social, political or economic rights. Fifty years ago when small groups of “brave women” tried to bring the issue of domestic violence onto the political and social agenda there was little recognition by the “power holders” within society. However, a more vociferous feminist movement (1970’s onwards) enabled the issue to be brought to the table for discussion, debate and resolution. The result was the birth and growth of a “movement” to aid female victims of abuse: shelters, help-lines, funding, outreach programs etcetera (Cook, 1997; Fontes, 1999). However, a parallel discovery, although much more muted in expression, have been findings that show high levels of male victims in domestic violence (Archer, 2000; Straus & Gelles, 1986; Fiebert, 1997; Broth 1994; Stitt & Macklin, 1997; Stets and Straus, 1990; Steinmetz, 1980); but in contrast to the plight of the female victim, the male victim of domestic violence finds very limited, if any, services available to him. He is “excluded” from taking on the identity of “victim”, shielded from its associated compassion; he is “invisible”, his voice “silenced”.² His label/identity is rendered to that of a “statistical minority”. Fontes (1999) makes an

² For instance, the study “Safety and Sanctions” (Kelleher and O’Connor, 1999) while addressing the issue of domestic violence and the enforcement of law in Ireland neglects to mention or include the position of the male victim.

analogy to the “statistical minority” label attached to female aids patients; that is, they form, for the most part, the lower percentage of patients (10-15%) yet it is never questioned that essential services, or access to them, should be denied because of their minority numerical status. The same correlation does not occur in relation to male victims of domestic violence. Twenty years ago many in the women’s movement invited men to be more open with their feelings, the issue now, “is anyone listening?”³

In addressing the issue of male victimisation domestic violence will be defined as will its problematic nature. The impact of gender, as an ideological concept, will lead into a discussion of structural and individual causes. The experiences of the victim will be documented, as will the “state of play” in relation to services, the judiciary, the police and enforcement “instruments”. Their segregated nature will be noted. Methodological approaches will be critiqued; their positive enhancements towards solutions but also their problematic usages will be central here. The paper will make use of both national and international research. The former will address the issues within services, the judiciary, the police and enforcement “instruments”. The latter will be used to discuss most of the findings. A fact, in of it-self, which demonstrates the lack of “knowledge” on the issue in relation to Ireland. A central and latent feature will be the exclusion of the male victim of domestic violence.

³ The purpose of this paper is not to set up a “them against us” scenario; the nature and extent of the acts of violence make the issue a very sensitive one and the point is not to take away from anyone, women, children or men, their position of being the “victim”. “Men batter/rape women” is the image depicted in the media with regard to domestic violence. However, this is a simplistic rendition of the problem. Yes, men commit acts of violence against women and children (Hearn, 1990), but so do women. Further, same-sex violence occurs (Lobel, 1986). Here, issue is not taken with the fact that women are professed as victims of violence, the fact is that they are, however, what needs to be acknowledged is that men, also, are victims of “domestic violence”, the focus of this paper will be this issue (Adams, 1999).

Definition

A government taskforce, in conjunction with Women's Aid, was set up to investigate the extent and nature of domestic violence in Ireland. They defined the phenomenon as:

Domestic violence refers to the use of physical or emotional force or threat of physical force, including sexual violence, in close adult relationships. This includes violence perpetrated by a spouse, partner, son, daughter or any other person who has a close relationship with the victim.

(Office of the Tainiste, 1997: 27)

The gender-neutral "*geist*" of the definition allows an inclusiveness of all persons, male and female, to be considered as the victim. Therefore, it is explicitly visible that according to the wording of the governmental definition of domestic violence, a definition that is utilised for the production and enactment of policy related to violence in the home, any person, male or female, young or old, adult or child, heterosexual or gay, can be a victim of domestic violence. However, state support for victims of violence tends to deal with the issue as primarily a female issue, to the neglect of all others except for children, both male and female. One could suggest though that once a male child outgrows childhood, his access to the label "victim" ceases.

Further, the term "domestic violence", in of itself, is regarded by some as being problematic. "Domestic" is usually related to the concept of "home" and the "family" which for many people both can take various forms (Hunt, 1995; Elliot, 1986). Added to this issue is the fact that "violence" is multi-faceted. It is suggested that it can comprise any one, or combination, of the following - physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse,⁴ destruction of property, isolation from friends, family and other potential sources

⁴ When it speaks of "violence" it goes beyond the overt visible acts of violence to include, what can be deemed worse than the actual act; that is the threat of violent acts.

of support, threats to others including children, stalking, and control over access to money, personal items, food, transport and the telephone (Office of the Tainiste, 1997). The list is extensive; violence tends not to be of one form but multiple forms (ibid: 28).

Gender Ideology

‘All history is the history of gender’ given that gender is implicated in all aspects of human activity (Tovey and Share, 2000: 99). Gender constitutes a complex multi-dimensional concept bounded by many theories and paradigms. Within this, gender relations are located in the context of inequality that privilege, for the most part, the category “male” over the category “female”. Contemporary societies are characterised by relations of difference, of particular significance is the continuous construction and reconstruction of the binary opposition – the female/male. With respect to same, difference rather than sameness has been the interpretation that has been imposed (Chunn and Lacombe, 2000). A key issue is about power, within which the political process can be viewed as an arena where different groups compete for dominance to ensure their own position (Galligan, 1993). Inferred above is the intrinsic link between the public power relations that occur between men and women and the structures within the patriarchal capitalist framework (Walby, 1986a) that enable power to be utilised in the first instance, be they political, social, economic or legislative. The maintenance of a gendered patriarchal framework is premised on an unequal distribution of power and resources between men and women and other men (Coltrane, 1998). This has implications for the

“male victim”. Thus, any analysis of domestic violence needs to be “unpacked” bearing gender ideology in mind.

Causes –structural and individual

Many writers recognize the origin of women’s oppression as located in the social construction of femininity (Lorber, 1991; Maynard and Winn, 1997); conversely, there are writers that understand the constraints of men to be situated in the social construction of masculinity (Connell, 1995; Hearn, 1987; Coltrane, 1998; Craib, 1987). This societal construction of masculinity and femininity, upheld and underpinned by stereotyped roles for both, is viewed as a major factor in the creation of the conditions that enable violence to occur, play out and continue. Men and women, respectively portrayed in the stereotyped identities of perpetrator and victim, are constrained by the static nature of these identities, when in fact the identity itself is fluid and interchangeable; the net result, it feeds into the cyclical construction/reconstruction of social identities for both.

In relation to male victims, Adler (1981) questions:

...whether such denial by a victim of his victimization is anything other than an attempt to suppress such feelings and to escape stigmatization by employing self-directed, self-critical humour. Men may view violence towards them and even the resulting injuries with little overt concern, but at the same time, experiencing inward trauma all because of the need to deny a sense of their own vulnerability, a burden imposed upon them by the values of a patriarchal society.
(Stitt & Macklin, 1997: www.amen.ie/reports/sstitt97.pdf)

The burden of a construction of a “hegemonic masculinity” –authoritative, intellectual, in control, non-emotional male - (Connell, 1995) impacts considerably on male victims; it limits and constrains their identity; further, it shuns and ridicules any deviation from the

hegemonic social, cultural or economic roles and identities of men:⁵ a “challenge” – a vulnerable male - is not allowed (George, 1992). Further, what could be described as a “hegemonic femininity” exists within which the underpinning gender script – female privilege - deems it acceptable to slap, push, ridicule, or throw objects at a man (Fontes, 1999). Hence, suggestive reasons why the ‘battered husband syndrome’ is so belittled, ridiculed and considered insignificant can be located in a patriarchal ethos that reinforces female victimization.⁶ By rooting the debate on domestic violence only in a biased notion of gender, (that is, one where females are deemed the only oppressed) as much mainstream research does, rather than the inherent attitudes and propensity of individuals to use violence and abuse as an inter-relational strategy, female victimization will continue, as will the unseen victimization of some men (Stitt and Macklin, 1997).

In opposition to the latter, there is the perspective that the problem stems from the pathology or deviance of the individual, or/and that it is a result of “dysfunctional” relationships (Bradshaw, 1996; Bland and Orn, 1986; Maynard and Winn, 1997; United Nations, 1994) underscored by individual mental illness, alcoholism, drugs, underdevelopment or stress. This explanation does not receive much credence, however from the feminist movement (Maynard and Winn, 1997).

There are some who will marry the two together in assessing the cause, however, for the most part the two perspectives remain, and are portrayed, in conflict.

Research Findings

⁵ Farrell (1974), expresses the notion that men are more constrained due to the contempt that they receive should they ‘deviate into a feminine role or fail in the masculine one’ (Messner, 1999), a notion that has implications in them coming forward as victims.

⁶ A question that arises out of this is if it suits certain institutions, groups, individuals, movements or “power” holders to have this situation- male perpetrator/female victim- compounded within society.

Research into the experience of the victim in domestic violence tend to show parallel results; that the violence can take multiple forms; that violence shows no respect to class or age, marriage status, or position in family; alcohol is visible as a factor that is pervasive in many cases; children are the silent victims in most cases; the perpetrator is known to the victim in most, if not all, cases; it usually takes a number of incidences of violence to occur if a victim is to seek help, if they seek it at all; physical and sexual assault can, and does, much of the time, go hand in hand. Inherent in the studies was the notion of not being understood and not being listened to. Most felt that they had no place to go to in order to get help due to their fear of not being believed. Emotional abuse was pervasive; they had been hit, stabbed, assaulted, and mentally abused; they hadn't left relationships due to fear of losing children; when they did walk out they usually lost the house and had nowhere to go especially if they took the children. The interesting feature of this set of experiences is that they all come from studies on male victims of domestic violence, experiences that are mirrored within female victim research⁷ (McHugh, Walsh and Casterkey, 1999; McNeely, Cook and Torres, 2001; Adams, 1999; Stitt and Macklin, 1997; Lewis and Sarantakos, 2001; Amen, 2000; Cook, 1997). When both the male and female research is viewed through a "non-gendered" lens it is evident that the issues, constraints, suffering and barriers to both sexes are similar in most respects while each

⁷ For female experiences see the following studies and academic research. It is found that the experiences are detailed in the same manner: Woman's Aid commissioned, "Safety and Sanctions: domestic violence and the enforcement of law in Ireland"; a study carried out by the Office of the Tainiste (1997) titled, "Violence against Women"; the National Women's Council (1996) "Report of the working party on the legal and judicial process for victims of sexual and other crimes of violence against women and children"; the "Policy Document for Women's refuges (1996)"; Garda Siochana annual reports from 1994, and the reports of the Domestic violence and sexual assault investigation unit since 1993. Academic writers further back up these findings (Dobash and Dobash, 1992; McWilliams and McKiernan, 1993; McWilliams and Spence, 1996; Kelleher and Associates, 1996; Edwards, 1989; and Kelleher & Associates and O'Connor, 1995.

group may claim some areas of uniqueness. Victim-hood is gender blind. What this could suggest is that domestic violence is a “humanity” issue rather than a “gender” issue (McNeely, Cook & Torres, 2001) nevertheless, it is the construction of the “male/female binary” in society that prevents it from being addressed in this manner.

Services in Ireland

There are a wide variety of services, help lines, support groups, associations, government departments, that are available to a victim of domestic violence in Ireland (Office of the Tainiste, 1997)⁸. However, these services are mainly available to women, thus the notion that the woman is the “sole victim” is portrayed and upheld.

The support groups that are available to men tend to revolve around groups that aid men in dealing with their own violence. Support groups such as M.O.V.E (Men overcoming violent emotions) are invaluable in dealing with the individual; however, they don’t do much for the structural issue (Hearn, 1999); the programs that some of them follow use “anger management” control techniques, whereas the central issue inherent in violence is “power” (O’Donoghue, 1999). The support group “Amen”⁹ is the only group that deals with males as victims of domestic violence in Ireland. However, it does not receive the same recognition and status as support groups for women.

⁸ These, for the most part, are voluntary based organisations. They can, and do, receive funding, however it is never enough; the shortage of the number of Refuges and the number of beds available at present is an example of the under funding (Community Workers Cooperative, 1999)

⁹ The irony of this is that it was founded by, and continues to be run by, a woman, Mary Cleary, a nurse who was appalled by the number of men that she was dealing with in emergency rooms, and upon investigation, their lack of support (Adams, 1999).

Overall the services that are available portray the problem of domestic violence in the binary of male/female perpetrator/victim.

The Judiciary, Enforcers and the Law

Fahey and Lyons (1995) did an extensive study of the Irish family court system. Overall the system was found it to be highly constraining in aiding to address issues that came before it; this included domestic violence. Further, a working group established by the Minister for Justice (1995) also found that there were many anomalies within the system (Kelleher and O'Connor, 1999).¹⁰ The same issue was raised with the probation services (Fahey and Lyons, 1995; Kelleher and O'Connor, 1999; McKeown et al, 1998).

When the police are analysed as an instrument in dealing with domestic violence they are, in most western countries, found to be lacking in effectiveness (Martin, 1976). This is largely recognised as a result of the police being reluctant to get involved in what is supposedly “deemed” a private relationship matter (Edwards, 1989). Further, a lot of the time the violence is viewed as a conflict to be “managed” rather than a crime to be investigated (Kelleher and O'Connor, 1999). Furthermore, the police forces are mainly a male force in which females are underrepresented, a fact that hinders both men and women as victims; both are at the mercy of a “cop culture” of masculinity and sexism, a culture that upholds the unequal power relations, and doesn't allow for the “vulnerable

¹⁰ It was felt that there was too much restriction of access to the records and judgments; that there was not enough resources to deal with the case loads that presented themselves; adequate statistical data was not being compiled in relation to the social issues inherent in the cases, they were not broken down into gender and this made research difficult; the privacy of the in-camera rule also hindered access to why judges made the decisions they did and restricted first hand reports being compiled; there were too few sittings of the family courts, especially in rural areas, where there is no regular sittings; the staff of the courts system were not trained sufficiently to deal with the sensitivity of the abuse suffered by victims, (Fahey and Lyons, 1995; Kelleher and O'Connor, 1999; McKeown et al, 1998).

male” (Edwards, 1989; Gelles and Straus, 1988). The force doesn’t see “husband battery” as a problem; they say there is no great evidence of it (Stitt and Macklin, 1997).

In 1993 the Domestic Violence and sexual assault unit (DVASIU) was set up to deal with the growing problem of violence in the home. In 1994 the Gardai issued a specific policy document¹¹ to deal with violence in the home. However, the gender neutrality of its discourse, is tarnished by echoes of the male/female binary, evidenced in its introduction when it names women as the victim in most instances (Office of the Tainiste, 1997).

In 1996 the Domestic Violence Act was enacted to address the issue of violence in the home. It set down the procedures of who can be arrested, when and how. Further, it named the “instruments” available to the courts: safety orders and barring orders¹² (Office of the Tainiste, 1997). Additionally, the application process for these orders is very much dictated by the constitutional preference of the “Family within Marriage”. Therefore, non-constitutional family forms have lesser access to their usage, while, gay men and women haven’t access to either of the orders under the pretext of being in a “relationship (Kelleher and O’Connor, 1999; Office of the Tainiste, 1997; Renzetti, 1992; Lobel, 1986). However, these instruments are considered contentious (Fahey and Lyons, 1995; McKeown, Ferguson and Rooney, 1998).¹³ When “female victimisation” is held

¹¹ Garda Siochana Policy on Domestic violence (updated in 1997).

¹² A safety order prohibits the person from further violence or the threat of it, although the perpetrator does not have to leave the residence. The barring order orders the perpetrator to leave the residence. While a case is waiting to be heard a protection order can be issued (same effect as a safety order) or an interim barring order can be obtained in exceptional cases where circumstances prevail that the perpetrator needs to be ousted straight away (Office of the Tainiste, 1997)

¹³ Recently in the Irish Supreme court the “interim barring order” was even declared unconstitutional, thus it has been nullified as an instrument of protection for both men and women. The ruling, while seen as been beneficial to those people that may have been accused in the wrong as being perpetrators, does leave actual victims in a vulnerable position and leave guilty perpetrators off the hook.

up as the “norm”, the judiciary, legislation and its instruments tend to give “favour” to females, to the neglect of male victims.

Methodology

A growing volume¹⁴ of studies suggest that the prevalence and pervasiveness of female perpetrators of violence against men and children is much higher than is claimed in society; they suggest that the incidence levels are at more of a parity than the 90% –10% ratio put forward by most feminist research. But why or how is this so? In order to address this question, and it must be stated that it is a contentious and complex one, there is a need to analyse the methodology that underpins each set of findings. An issue that impacts on the research process, one that can make research problematic, is that it is always possible to “find what one is looking for”. It can be suggested that this issue is highly prevalent within the study of domestic violence due to the sensitivity of the subject matter and the gendered arena in which it occurs.

There are two central aspects within the methodological issue. The first revolves around the conceptualisation of the term “violence” and its operationalisation within society. This is important because it underpins the second aspect, which centres on instrumentation – what are we to measure, who and how?

Research on domestic violence can be separated into what Kimmel (2001), Strauss (1999) and Tjaden and Thoennes, (1997) term “crime victimisation studies”

¹⁴ See Archer (2000), Fiebert (1997), Brinkerhoff and Lupri (1988), Brush (1990), Ernst et al (1997), Cook (1997), Steinmetz (1981), Straus and Gelles (1986), White and Kowalski (1994), and Carrado et al (1996) to name but a few.

(C.V.S) and “family conflict studies” (F.C.S).¹⁵ The former underpins much of feminist research, while the latter underscores the “parity” data findings between men and women.

C.V.S take their sample sources from large-scale national representative sampling frames,¹⁶ crime studies¹⁷ and clinical research.¹⁸ These studies have large sample sizes, in part because they are funded by national, state, and local government agencies. They examine a wide range of assaults, including sexual assault, and they ask about current, as well as past partner experience. However they ask only about those events that the person experiences, or reports to authorities, as a crime, and therefore miss those events that are neither perceived as nor reported as crimes (Kimmel, 2001). For example, while being slapped or kicked by a partner may be experienced as a horrendous or despicable, it takes relatively rare circumstances to perceive it as a "crime" (Ferraro, 1989; Ferraro and Johnson, 1983). These studies uniformly find dramatic gender asymmetry in rates of domestic violence. In sum, crime victimization studies typically find that domestic violence is rare, serious, escalates over time, and is perpetrated by men (Kimmel, 2001; Strauss, 1999; Fontes, 1999).

F.C.S (they use the Conflict Tactics Scale (C.T.S) as measurement instrument) are based on smaller-scale nationally representative household surveys and clinical studies.¹⁹

These surveys interview only one partner of a cohabiting couple²⁰ about their experiences

¹⁵ See Appendix A for a contrast of findings of the two types of studies

¹⁶ National Violence Against Women in America Survey (NVAW) sponsored by the National Institute of Justice and the Centers for Disease Control (see Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1998).

¹⁷ National Crime Survey, and the National Crime Victimization Study (NCVS).

¹⁸ Police data and statistics, refuge shelters and emergency departments in hospitals; the criticism of clinical studies is that they tend to tell only one side of the story be it clinical studies of male or female victims. For instance, research on refuge shelters tends to be biased in their findings, while at the same time being a valid study of the persons experience.

¹⁹ The National Family Violence Survey or the National Survey of Families and Households, and the British and Canadian national surveys (Kimmel, 2001; Strauss, 1999; Fontes, 1999).

²⁰ They focus on couples over 18 and don't place centrality on being married, thus the term cohabiting.

with various methods of expressing conflict in the family with current partner only. Further, they focus on physical assault only, but take into account both the severe and less serious aspects (if there is such a thing: violence is violence); that is, those that might not be reported, or even thought to be a crime; those that don't end up as an "injury". These studies conclude gender symmetry at work in the use of violence to resolve family conflicts. In sum, then, FCS tend to find high rates of domestic violence, stable levels of severity, low rates of injury and find it perpetrated equally by women and men (Kimmel, 2001; Strauss, 1999; Fontes, 1999).

Kimmel (2001), among others,²¹ criticizes the use of the "C.T.S" as an instrument for measuring the depth of family violence. He states that it fails to take into account the context within which the "act" occurs; it doesn't measure who initiates the "act"; or what is the intention or motivation for the "act" – expressive or instrumental;²² it doesn't address the contradiction, if females are violent in the home, why is it not mirrored in public; finally, the scale relies on retrospective analysis and reporting. In essence it is deemed as operating within a "narrow"²³ perspective on the phenomenon.

Strauss acknowledges that the C.T.S focuses on "physical assault" and not on injury; he even acknowledges that women, on average, suffer more frequent and more severe injury than men (Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz 1980; Stets and Straus 1990). However, for social, legal and moral reasons he says there is a need to focus on physical

²¹ See DeKeseredy and Schwartz (1998a).

²² People can initiate "expressive" acts of violence within a "loosing control" context, thus it is open to anyone; however there is also the use of "instrumental violence" – the use of violence to control or subjugate someone (see Kimmel, 2001).

²³ The "narrow" perspective underpins much of the research that focuses on all assaults (the "parity" level data findings), the "broad" perspective underscores much of feminist research. See App.B, for a contrast of what Fontes (1999) and Strauss (1999) label "narrow" and "broad" perspectives. The differences revolve mainly sampling; instrumentation; conceptualization of violence and its operationalisation; who is doing the research; and the aims and agenda of the researcher.

assault; someone does not have to be injured to be a victim of assault,²⁴ “minor” assault can lead to severe assaults (Feld and Straus, 1989), and morally, no one should be open to assault (Strauss, 1999). Further, in response to continued criticism to the growing number of studies declaring “parity” of use of violence, a C.T.S 2 was developed (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, and Sugarman, 1996)²⁵ which measured for injury. The results roughly correlated near the rates of the “crime studies”, thus supporting the idea that one of the main reasons crime studies find that domestic assaults are overwhelmingly committed by men is because they tend to omit so many of the assaults that do not result in injury. Therefore male victims are less identifiable within mainstream research on domestic violence.

Theory building, use/abuse of data and funding

Much of feminist theory is underpinned by the constraints of patriarchal structures, the “natural” aggressiveness associated with men, the differences in size and strength, and the notion that if women do assault men it is in self-defence.²⁶ There is no real responsibility taken for female battery of men. Further, the impact of the complexity, and contradicting truths, inherent in the methodological approach taken, that emerge are compounded through the use of their findings to underpin theory building. As stated above this can lead to the marginalisation of male victims through a “broad” perspective that focuses on injury. What’s more, while mainstream research will openly criticise the

²⁴ The Federal Bureau of investigations (1995) in their definition of assault states that injury does not have to result for an assault to occur.

²⁵ See also for use of CTS2; Carrado et al, 1996; and Canadian centre for Justice Statistics; www.statcan.ca

²⁶ This factor is the biggest defence used; see Browne (1987); Campbell (1992); Dobash & Dobash (1979); Pagelow (1984), Saunders (1986), Hopper (1996) cited in Fontes (1999).

C.T.S, they are quick to use its findings to its advantage²⁷ (Fontes, 1999) because the C.T.S gives higher rates of overall assaults, though they neglect to say though that the same results count for men.

It was stated at the start of the paper that the feminist “movement” of the 70’s instigated the negotiation of the position of women in relation to domestic violence. It could be suggested that this has now turned into an “industry”, one that has to be carefully managed; central to the survival of this is the issue of funding. If domestic violence is measured by a “narrow” perspective it unearths male victims and there will be a call for a share of the funds. This causes much concern for service providers (Stitt and Macklin, 1997; McNeely, Cook and Torres, 2001; George, 1998; Hoff-Sommers, 1995). Even Sandra Horley, Director of the first women’s refuge in Chiswick, suggests there are resource implications, “Refuges for women are struggling to survive and if the idea that the abuse of men is as great as women then it could seriously affect our funding” (The Spectator, 28 November 1992; cited in Stitt and Macklin, 1997). Therefore, the male victim is further marginalized due to economic concerns.

Appropriate usage of data

²⁷ 2 million women are assaulted by their husbands each year (Straus, 1977); The FBI reports that a woman is assaulted every 15 seconds in this country by her husband (Calif. Dept. of Justice, 1997); 4 million women are assaulted by their male partners each year (Family Violence Prevention Fund, 1997); A woman is assaulted every 9 seconds in this country by her male partner (Family Violence Prevention Fund, 1997). All of these statements are based on data, which comes from the CTS.

When above research is put against each other a conflict of “truths” arises within which each will, and probably can claim, validity. However, as discussed, this can lead to the misuse of the findings. There is a solution though. As stated both research methods are valid and reliable instruments, the complexity lies in that they are measuring different things. Yet both sets of findings are unearthing “valid” victims, people who need help, support and compassion. Even if one was to focus solely on the “broad” C.V.S. data, there would be 835,000²⁸ male victims in need of the services available to women who suffer the severest type of abuse, that is, the type perceived as a crime and that causes injury (McNeely, Cook and Torres, 2001). Therefore, those types of studies, C.V.S, could be used to inform programmes to deal with “*any*” victims of severe assault and injury –shelters, help lines, ect. The “narrow” perspective, informed by the F.C.S, could be used for the setting up of “primary preventative” programmes for couples so as to ensure that a problem does not develop – the act of nipping a problem in the bud. A third solution may be to combine the two instruments. No combination was unearthed within the scope of this research except for the CTS2.

It remains to be seen, however, whether the two perspectives will reach an agreement to acknowledge the plight of the “other”, or will they compound the already entrenched dualisms that surround, and are implicit to, the arena of domestic violence discourse. With respect to men, men who are punched, slapped, kicked, bitten, or otherwise assaulted by their wives or partners are no less deserving of compassion, understanding, and intervention than are women who are so assaulted. And male victims deserve access to services and funding, just as female victims do. Nor do they need to be half of all victims in order to deserve either sympathy or services.

²⁸ This is according to the National Violence Against Women Survey in the United States.

Conclusion

Gender is a powerful and complex process that impacts enormously on the phenomenon of domestic violence. This occurs more so for the male victim due to the feminisation of the identity of “victim”. When the judicial, legislative and law enforcement instruments are critiqued this feminisation is compounded. However, a crucial factor, implicit in the methodology of the researcher, is the choice of “instrumental measure” used to gather data. Crime victimisation studies and family conflict studies both measure assault but they do so from a different conceptualisation of violence. Hence both unearth differential rates of assault and use their findings to build theoretical debates on domestic violence, debates that are centred on a hierarchy of victim hood underscored by an issue of funding. Research data from both perspectives are, at present, hijacked by each other to bolster their position within the political, economic and social arenas. Both sets of data are reliable, however, there needs to be more dialogue and communication between both sides if the issue of domestic violence is to be addressed in relation to “preventative” measures being put in place and “support systems” set up for the most severe cases. It remains to be seen if this will occur. This situation creates a conflict amongst those involved, a conflict that results in a dual discourse surrounding domestic violence within which both sides claim validity of victim hood. Central to this is the binary “broad”/“narrow” perspective.

If a “broad perspective”, on domestic violence were to be taken as reflecting society then violence in the home would be seen as a white female middle class issue:

that women are the sole victims and that this occurs due to the aggressiveness of men. There would be no/little room for other victims such as men; they are excluded, shut out, fully or partially, from any of the social, economic, political or cultural support systems available to a victim of domestic violence. It renders their plight - being punched, kicked, stabbed, evicted, lost their home and kids, economically bankrupt, emotionally and mentally abused, or ultimately killed, as insignificant. A “narrow” perspective is criticised for not measuring those that are most severely injured, however, when its measurement is adjusted (CTS2) to take this into account, the problem of the central focus of the “broad” perspective on “injury” is compounded. This is crucial to male victims as they may not be as severely injured as female victims, thus their assault is not perceived or reported, as a crime, or logged in the emergency departments of hospitals. Hence, they become a “statistical” minority within the dominant discourse – female research - and are identified as the “other” in relation to the victim, that is, the “perpetrator”.

Appendix A

Table (1) taken from Strauss (1999)²⁹

TABLE 1. VARIATIONS IN DOMESTIC ASSAULT STATISTICS					
	FAMILY CONFLICT STUDIES	NATIONAL CRIME SURVEY	CRIME VICTIM SURVEY	POLICE CALL DATA	NVAW STUDY ¹
ANNUAL ASSAULT RATE	10-35% (16%) ²	0.2%	0.9%	0.2% ³	1.1%
FRACTION OF FAMILY CONFLICT RATE	=====>	1/80 TH	1/18 TH	1/80 TH	1/15 TH
INJURY RATE	1 TO 3%	75%	52%	unknown	76% ¹
MALE (top) & FEMALE RATE	12.2% 12.4% ⁴	0.4% 0.03%	0.76% 0.11%	90% male ⁵	1.3% 0.9%
MALE TO FEMALE RATIO	1:1	13:1	7:1	9:1	1.4:1

²⁹ (1)Based on Bachman (1998) and my recall of data presented by Tjaden and Thoennes (1997). The statistics cannot be confirmed until the sponsoring agencies releases the data, which is still under review; **the final row statistics were updated by me from an updated paper by Strauss.** (2)The lower end of this range is for married couples. The upper end reflects the large number of studies which show that rate for dating couples of 25 to 40% (Sugarman & Hotaling, 1989). Stets and Straus (1990) attribute the high rate to the youthfulness of dating couples. They found that, for young married couples, the rates were even higher than for dating couples of that age. (3) Based on all aggravated assaults known to the police in 1994 (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1995) because the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) do not distinguish between domestic assaults and other assaults. In 1994 the UCR rate of assaults 430 per hundred thousand population (0.4%). An unknown fraction of these were domestic assaults. To be on the safe side, I used half of that as domestic assaults. (4) To avoid bias due to possible under-reporting by men of their own assaults, these rates were computed from information provided by the 2,994 women in the 1985 National Family Violence Survey. The rates given are for any assault. The ratio was essentially the same for minor and severe assaults. See Straus, 1994. (5) The rates for men and women cannot be given because police call data are only reported as the percent of cases with a male offender, not as rates per 100 or 1,000 men and women.

Appendix B

TABLE 3. VARIABLES UNDERLYING BROAD VERSUS NARROW DEFINITIONS OF VIOLENCE.

	BROAD DEFINITION	NARROW DEFINITION
A. COVERAGE	All Types of Maltreatment	Only Physical Assault
B. ROLE OF INJURY IN CONCEPT OF VIOLENCE	An Inherent Part of the Concept	One of Many <u>Possible</u> Consequences to Be Investigated
C. OCCUPATION/ROLE	Service Providers/Feminist Activists	Academics/Researchers
D. STATISTICS FAVORED TO DESCRIBE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM	Police and Crime Survey Because They Show More Women Victims and Suggest Cause Is Patriarchy	Family Conflict Because They Show Ubiquity of the Problem and Suggest Multiple Causes
E. STATISTICS FAVORED TO MOBILIZE RESOURCES	Family Conflict Because Rates Are Many Times Greater	Family Conflict Because Rates Are Many Times Greater
F. PRIMARY (BUT NOT EXCLUSIVE) MORAL CONCERN	End Oppression of Women, Regardless of the Type of Oppression	End Physical Assaults, Regardless of the Gender of Perpetrator or Victim
G. PRIMARY USE OF RESEARCH USING THE DEFINITION	Cessation of Assaults on Women, Especially Assaults Experienced as a "Real Crime"	"Primary Prevention" of Physical Violence of All Types, from Spanking to Murder

Taken from Strauss (1999)

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