

**ABUSE OF ADULT MALES IN INTIMATE PARTNER
RELATIONSHIPS IN NORTHERN IRELAND**

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Acknowledgement

The research team wish to thank all those who willingly agreed to be interviewed for this research. It was through their willingness to share their often difficult life experiences that this research was made possible.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The study revealed that the experiences of male victims in Northern Ireland were similar to those reported in studies in other local jurisdictions. Male respondents reported a variety of abuse – from emotional to serious physical assault, including occasional serious sexual assaults by their female partner.
2. Male partner experiences were similar to those reported in cognate studies. Nearly all respondents considered that the emotional effects of abuse were the most serious.
3. What is absent from other studies is the recognition that such abuse may be continued into extra-familial domains – respondents were particularly concerned about their experience with the legal process and consequences in relation to their employment and to their accommodation.
4. Most studies fail to reveal the various devices that male respondents utilise to cope with or to manage the abuse. A variety of such strategies were noted – from physical exercise to deliberate absence from home. Such solitary coping strategies were invariably unsuccessful.
5. Unique to males is the effect of patriarchal images on the question of reporting. Traditional images of masculinity appeared to be the primary reason for the failure of the respondents to report injuries to friends, and to voluntary and statutory agencies.
6. As in other studies, a minority of men attempted to utilise the available support agencies. Experiences were mixed, although the respondents universally proffered the view that reporting to the police would produce unsupportive reactions. The male respondents also argued that a similar lack of support was found within other institutions, legal process and from the legal professions. The respondents also held the view that this was in contrast to the support that reports of female victimisation would elicit.
7. There were a limited number of respondents in same-sex relationships and consequently evidence of gay victimisation in partner relations was limited. However, the small number who did participate reported similar experiences to men in abusive heterosexual relationships.

SECTION ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background

This study was commissioned by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister of the Northern Ireland Assembly on behalf of the Northern Ireland Domestic Violence Forum (NIDVF). It breaks new ground in that jurisdiction by providing evidence of male experience in abusive partner relationships. Specifically, it documents the features of such partner abuse, the effects of abuse, the coping strategies of male victims, the contribution of patriarchal stereotypes to the sustenance of abuse, and the sources and the perceived inadequacies of voluntary and statutory support for the male victims.

The origins of this project lie in the Forum's acknowledgement that there may be a vacuum in the current support structure in relation to partner domestic violence. The existing mechanisms have focused chiefly on women as the victims of violence and men as perpetrators. This is despite some, often anecdotal, emerging evidence that men too can be objects of their partner's abuse. Relate, N.I. Victim Support, and other agencies participating in the Forum, had reported that they were becoming increasingly aware of domestic violence against men. In some 10% of the incidents reported to the then Royal Ulster Constabulary, the victims were male (Stanko 2001). For example, male partners occasionally sought advice from the Women's Aid HelpLine.

The Forum accepted (as in the case with domestic violence against women) that reported incidents did not necessarily give as an accurate reflection of the extent of the problem. The difficulties that women face in reporting domestic violence and in seeking support are well documented (e.g. Dobash and Dobash 1979). It was therefore reasonable to assume that men might also encounter reporting problems and difficulty seeking appropriate support.

The Forum recognised that the current primary focus on both female spouse and (child) abuse may sometimes ignore events and behaviours, which could have far-reaching negative consequences for men subject to abuse, and indeed, to their families. It was this realisation that little was known about the male partner experience in Northern Ireland and a genuine concern to see the development of

effective responses to male victims that formed the backdrop for this research.

NIDVF appreciated that it would be unrealistic to assume that men's experience of domestic violence paralleled that of women or that identical agency responses should be developed for male victims. It also recognised that research methodologies which measured the experience and extent of female victimisation, might not be appropriate when applied to the experience of men. The proposed investigation would represent a step towards understanding the male victim's experiences and needs. It would utilise qualitative techniques for assessing any such victimisation, abuse, and agency response.

Current Knowledge

Until recently, presumptions regarding female violence against males have been that, insofar as it exists, it is the mirror image of male violence against females. However, that presumption was qualified in a number of ways. Caveats include the notions that where male victimisation occurs, it may be a reciprocal action where both parties may experience some violation and it is difficult to determine whom initiated the aggravation. Secondly, that in any case, where such victimisation was established, it would not be of the same severity of impact as in female victimisation. Thirdly, any such abuse would occur to a much lesser extent. If the two types of partner abuse were of a parallel character, the support devices such as battered women's shelters would, where resources allow, provide for similar support – if less extensive - for male victims.

But there is reason to believe that there are qualitative differences between the two types of abuse that may require alternative forms of amelioration and support. One part of this study is concerned to suggest that male needs are not necessarily identical to the needs of female victims and that a different approach may be relevant where such qualitative differences in need appear.

Furthermore, evidence has also emerged that in some instances of women's violence against their male partners, it was part of a larger pattern or cycle of abuse within the partnership or family. Abuse of a partner, male or female, might be only one component of a larger family abuse syndrome, perhaps including child and elder abuse. Greater understanding of such conflict would assist in developing responses to domestic violence or family abuse in the wider context in Northern Ireland.

The Research Focus

Initially the primary research question posed was

- to discover the extent of any such victimisation in Northern Ireland together with subsidiary questions regarding severity, frequency, and access to support services

However, for several reasons, the final research question was re-focussed on qualitative rather than quantitative matters. This was because

- a. The nature of the topic and its complexities does not lend itself readily to the kind of statistical analysis implicit in such an initial focus.
- b. In Northern Ireland – as compared with Scotland, England and Wales, and further afield in the United States and Canada – there is an absence of adequate secondary data sets within the preceding victim surveys in that jurisdiction. Such quantitative material does not exist in a reliable form from which to draw insights and deductions as the basis for a more substantive statistical research project on male victimisation.
- c. Preceding studies in other domains have increasingly moved away from the comparative method implicit in quantitative analysis (who suffers most, males or females) – often involving fraught comparisons between male and female abuse – to be more concerned with the severity of the impact on victims rather than perhaps invidiously setting up one form of victimisation as a competing territory with regard to potential resource allocation or political debate with the other.

Consequently, the focus of the present study was directed primarily at the qualitative experience of self-reported victims, partly because of their own importance as victims *per se*, but also because it might allow greater understanding of family abuse and conflict by the relevant support agencies

The Key Research Questions

Universally within Anglo-American societies, controversy about male victims of domestic abuse can now be located within six themes.

1. As the succeeding definition makes clear, the current abuse rubric encompasses many different forms of harm both physical and non-physical – what are the characteristics of abuse experienced by male partners?
2. Women sometimes passively and sometimes actively deal with abuse in a variety of ways – from the extremes of continuing acceptance to the other polarity of combating the abuse and seeking external support. How do male victims react to an abusive partner?
3. Abuse may have both direct and indirect effects – from physical pain to effects on lifestyle and on employment. What does the male victim evidence reveal about these different types of consequence?
4. Traditional stereotypes play a key role in the subject's expectations of 'normal' abuse and of significant reactions to it – how do men deal with preconceptions of their 'masculinity' and 'relative power' in heterosexual abuse relations?
5. Is there a measurable need for specialist services for *male* victims of domestic abuse?
6. Information from gay victims may suggest different explanation of abuse than those that emphasise male dominance. If such abuse is as common in homosexual relationships as in heterosexual ones, then traditional emphasises on male dominance may not be a sufficient explanation. Some evidence is necessary of the character of male-male partner relations.

Inevitably such a study as in this Report encounters several key tensions over gender relations, ones that are open to development and clarification in a different context. While limited comparison between male and female victimisation is inevitable in such a monograph, it is neither the aim nor the capacity of this study to explore the quantitative comparison between the two phenomena. Sequentially, while any such documentation of male victimisation may have subsequent implications – given limited statutory and voluntary agency resources – for support provision for the different types of victim, it is outside the remit of this study to explore such determinations. This is not a study which seeks to explore the relative male-female experience in combative mode.

A further problem relates to the definition of abuse. The original conception of domestic abuse has long been superseded by a recognition that inter-personal violence can assume other forms than within the artificial limits of physical violence – i.e. that which is normally potentially subject to legal penalty. Clearly in extending the definition beyond that legal straitjacket, necessarily subjective components enter the analysis – not all forms of emotional and psychological pressure are open to agreement over the character and nature. Nor are they as susceptible to empirical measurement.

Varying definitions of abuse create both research and policy problems. It was initially proposed that, for the purposes of this project, domestic violence should be defined as:

“ the use of physical or emotional force or threat within close adult relationships in a way that causes harm or distress to victims. In addition to actual or threatened physical or sexual assault and damage to property, domestic violence includes non-physical intimidation, such as persistent verbal abuse, emotional blackmail and enforced social or financial deprivation.”¹

This definition was later extended in the light of – *inter alia* - recent research on elder abuse research (Brogden and Nijhar 2000) to recognise that in the particular context of the male experience, abuse may have non-familial components – such as threats to employment and legal process which may be perceived as discriminatory. While such latter factors may also be applicable to women, they are often gendered in character. Some consequences of partner abuse may be relatively unique to male experience. It seems appropriate therefore to include notions of abuse wider than that of the familial context.

Outline of Sections

The monograph follows an appropriate pattern in order to detail and clarify the above issues. Section Two seeks to clarify in accessible form ‘what we already know’ about male victimisation in partner relationships. It summarises the state of knowledge about male partner victimisation in Anglo-American societies. It notes that different methodologies have produced different results on male-female domestic violence.

¹ Tackling Domestic Violence – A Policy for Northern Ireland, DHSS 1995 p.2

Section Three delineates the particular, *ethnographic*, qualitative methodology utilised in the study and the characteristics of the respondents. It argues that a qualitative approach to understanding the problems is the only realistic way to proceed

Section Four deals sequentially with the evidence from the fifty two male respondents - *Components of Abuse; Effects of Abuse; Management of Abuse; Contribution of Masculine Stereotypes* and *Agency Reactions*. Section Four concludes with details from a limited number of gay victims.

Finally, Section Five details the resultant recommendations. It concentrates on the question of the development of support services for male victims.

SECTION TWO

THE STATE OF KNOWLEDGE ON MALE

VICTIMISATION

Key Points

- ❑ Most evidence of male partners victimisation until recently was anecdotal rather than substantive.
- ❑ Studies from a feminist perspective were the first serious attempt to document spouse abuse. To a varying extent, they predominantly argued that the main source of spousal abuse lay in traditional masculine notions of power in gender relationships.
- ❑ Contrarily, more recent Family Violence studies have suggested that spousal abuse may often be derived from more complex factors of family relations.
- ❑ What is clear is that different quantitative research methods on spousal abuse often produce quite different results about the contributions of males and females to that abuse – community crime surveys tend to emphasise the disproportionate violence against women, victim and family violence surveys tend to suggest much more parity in relatively minor male-female violence.
- ❑ Qualitative ethnographic studies of both female and male victims for the most part avoid the question of blame and concentrate on the degree of harm and victimisation.

Early Information on Male Victimization

Until the late 1960s, most knowledge of partner victimisation in the household drew upon literary and historical accounts. Such textual details clearly emphasised the role of women as the predominant victims in household abuse and violence. More recently, several writers have noted literary illustrations of women being publicly rebuked for acting as the aggressive party in intimate relationships. There are historical references (for example, in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*) to medieval and rural chastisements of such women under the rubric of the 'hen-pecked' husband. Allusions are made to the *scold* – the iron horse on which a woman was forced to ride around the village to signify community disapproval of her alleged abuse of her husband. Similarly, devices such as the *bridle* to stop the 'nagging' wife were relatively common. Unworthy males, who failed to curtail their partner's aggression, in the 18th and 19th century, might be forced to wear women's clothing and "a battered husband" was made to wear an outlandish outfit and ride backwards around the village on a donkey" (Steinmetz and Lucca 1988). (The quality of such work is typified by one study that claims the 'discovery' that Abraham Lincoln's wife was violent, propelled him towards to the Presidency as an escape from home!)

In the present day, cartoon strips (the Andy Capp syndrome - presumably drawn from popular folklore) may dwell on female household violence. For example, Saenger's early study (1963) of newspaper comic violence, noted that three-quarters of the perpetrators were women. Husbands were the victims of aggression in 63% of conflict situations, while wives were victims in 39% of situations. In 10% of situations, husbands and wives were equally aggressive and in only 17% of situations were husbands more violent than wives. Jokes are common about hen-pecked husbands (Wilkinson 1981).

However much of this data is little more than anecdotal, reflecting popular prejudices as much as hard empirical evidence. Such material, while demonstrating a consistent trajectory in popular images of women historically, proves nothing. The scold and the bridle for example, like the ducking stool for the presumed witch, may have been nothing more than an attempt to maintain patriarchy against women who did not readily accept a lower status. Similarly, caricatures may reflect the prejudices of their masculine authors rather than representing a valid account of household relations – there remain few popular female cartoonists.

Current Academic Approaches

In the last twenty years, two different social science schools – *feminist* and *family violence* - have produced often-contradictory findings on the extent and character of male victimisation in partner relationships.

1. Feminist Contributions

The voluminous literature on domestic abuse owes most to feminist contributions. While there are variations in emphasis in such a wide movement, generally feminist studies have explained victimisation in the household as a function of material inequalities, institutional values, and historically embedded social practices that confer power and privilege on men. Generally, men are perceived as either perpetrators or as complicit bystanders whose failure to effectively challenge abuse perpetrated by other men sustains female victimisation (Hearn 1998). In such work, men's victimisation is only recognised within the context of women's defensive response to their cumulative experience of harassment, intimidation, and violence. Where men suffer from abuse, it is a consequence of reciprocal violence from their female partners. Such studies perceived a continuum of emotional, physical, sexual, and financial abuse in intimate relationships.

The problems with such work in relation to the recognition of male victimisation in partner relations include a number of factors. In its older form, emphasis on the patriarchal structure of interpersonal relationships inevitably excluded factors that may result in male victimisation. Feminist scepticism often curtailed the recognition of male victimisation. In particular, documentation of that phenomenon was sometimes perceived as a threat to resource distribution to support female victims. Generally, such studies have suggested (as below) a ratio of some 9:1 in terms of female male victimisation patterns and that men are rarely direct victims.

2. Family Violence Research

Family Violence studies (often relying on a particular psychological measuring instrument – the Conflict Tactics Scale) have been primarily designed not to explain women's relative powerlessness in such relationships but rather the extent of victimisation in the family as a whole. They have a different *raison d'etre*.

Where inter-personal violence was encountered in such surveys, half the partners were reciprocally violent (the *mutual combatant* thesis). The remainder divided

almost equally between those cases where men were the primary perpetrators and where women were the primary perpetrators. Much of this evidence has been challenged by feminists and others – for example over the failure of the measuring instrument, the Conflict Tactics Scale, to document forms of violence that most affect women (sexual assault, choking, suffocating, and stalking) and under-sampling those whose victimisation is most likely to have been severe – such as women in refuges. There is little agreement on the validity of such criticism. But it is accepted by both feminist and Family Violence scholars that whatever the ratio of male–female abuse, women generally sustain more severe physical injuries than men. (Straus 1993)

3. Different Methods, Different Results

The two different perspectives have drawn methodologically on often quite different instruments to document their claims – crime surveys (from the reported crime rates to self-report surveys of community crime) and on community victimisation studies (where violence may not have a criminal connotation). Certain studies have drawn on samples of the general population; others on self-selected abused populations. Samples of the general population can provide some estimate of the extent of violence and abuse. However the broad sweep of those response categories cannot deal with the individual differences of experience. They necessarily combine often quite different subjective experiences of victimisation under the same heading. They furnish little in terms of the evidence of the qualitative factors – particularly, the effects of that experience. Random samples of the general population (or of limited populations such as university students) can provide some estimate of the extent of violence and abuse. Because of the necessary limitations on the size of such samples, they may exclude the most serious forms of abuse which may only affect a minute proportion of the population.

Conversely self-selected populations are necessarily untypical of the population at large. Surveys of them cannot provide estimates of the extent of such violence and abuse. But they are very effective at documenting the severity of the experience for individuals and the forms of resolution achieved. Only an oral methodology can deal adequately with subjective experiences.

This study takes the second approach insofar as it focuses on the nuances of the victimisation experience and on the quality of support required for developing policies about appropriate support procedures for victims. The major body of primary

- Posters sent to all accident and emergency departments throughout the North.
- Posters sent to all domestic violence police officers for display in reception areas of police stations.
- Dissemination of information through conferences, organisational databases, and organisational newsletters.
- By far the most successful approach was through features in local newspapers and radio stations.

The interviewees (52 respondents making this the largest such study to date) were given the opportunity to be interviewed at home, in a neutral venue of their choice, or at the research base, if preferred. Each interview lasted approximately two hours but on many occasions the interview extended beyond that time-scale. Each interview was taped with the permission of the interviewee and later transcribed and anonymised. Due to the sensitive nature of this research each interviewee was informed of the confidential nature of their information i.e. that no names or identifying factors would be included in the final Report. No financial incentive was offered for participation in the report. Names used in the report are substitutions for actual names.

The key parameters of the schedule included.

- Immediate biographical details – employment, family, relationships, socio-economic class, age etc.
- Detailing of the abuse – features and perceived causes – reciprocity in relations.
- Detailing the short and long-term effects and consequences of abuse – for example for emotional, mental and physical health, and on relationships, employment, finance etc.
- How the victim responded to the abuse – coping mechanisms.
- Disclosure to friends and family and to the voluntary and statutory services – investigation of the men's experience of the attitudes and responses of those from whom they sought assistance.
- The role of the other parties in reporting or ignoring the abuse.
- Reactions of the social audience – attitudes towards the issue of domestic abuse of male victims.
- Victims' evaluation of third party support from voluntary and statutory services, including legal reactions.
- Victims' needs and recommendations.

4.1 THE COMPONENTS OF VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

Key Points

- ❑ Physical violence was creative, common, often unpredictable, and included sexual violence. Weapons or surprise attacks might compensate for the male's superior strength.
- ❑ Emotional abuse appeared to have been the most severe according to respondents, especially when conducted with an audience of the joint children of the household.
- ❑ Victimization could be exercised obliquely by control of household affairs such as rationing financial income and expenditure or exclusion from family meals.
- ❑ Sleep deprivation was especially pernicious according to the respondents, especially where employment required concentration.
- ❑ Physical violence against the male partner might be accompanied by apparently random destruction of household property.
- ❑ Children might also be physically harmed in the process – apparently as surrogates for the male adult.
- ❑ Sexual victimization might range from either direct attacks on the partners' genitals to denigration of the partner's sexual competence *vis a vis* other males.
- ❑ Finally, several males claimed that false accusations either to the police regarding alleged violence to the female partner or to their children were one way in which the female partner could assume household dominance.

In domestic violence, traditional studies dwelt on physical violence. They conformed to gendered stereotypes by focussing on a form of violence that is perceived to be characteristic of males. However, in this study, the definition of abuse was drawn from a wider domestic discourse of violence and abuse. Several discrete categories of abuse could be distinguished. Victim accounts determine the distinctions and relative severity. The following categories were emphasised.

Table 4.1 Examples of Weapons Used against Male Victims

EXAMPLES OF WEAPONS USED
BELT
KNIVES [HOUSEHOLD & NON-HOUSEHOLD]
FORKS
BOTTLES
SCISSORS
HIGH-HEELED SHOE
VASES
SAUCEPANS
CHAIRS
HEDGECLIPPERS
AXE
PLATE (WITH OR WITHOUT DINNER ON IT)
BOILING SOUP
STEERING-WHEEL CLAMP
ROLLING PIN
TURKEY FORK
TELEPHONE
ELECTRIC IRON
LUMP OF WOOD
T.V. CABLE (AS WHIP)
HOOVER
AEROSOL SPRAYS
TABLETS
DOG
BREADBOARD
SCREWDRIVER

Table 4.2: Examples of physical abuse by partner

EXAMPLES OF PHYSICAL ABUSE BY PARTNER	
PUSHING	ATTACKING IN SLEEP
GRABBING	CHOKING IN SLEEP
PULLING BY EARS	WHIPPING
SCRATCHING – DRAWING BLOOD	ATTEMPTED ELECTROCUTION
KNIFE TO THROAT	THREATENED WITH SHOT GUN
STABBING	SPRAYING IN FACE WITH AEROSOL
HIT WITH WEAPONS/ OBJECTS	ATTEMPTING TO PULL CAR OFF ROAD
BITING – BREAKING SKIN	BY PULLING STEERING WHEEL
PULLING HAIR	DRUGGING FOOD
PUNCHING	SCREWDRIVER UP NOSTRIL
SLAPPING	DESTROYING PERSONAL
KICKING	BELONGINGS/ CLOTHES
KNEEING/ KICKING IN GROIN	DESTROYING HOUSEHOLD ITEMS /
VIOLENCE TOWARDS CHILDREN/	DOORS ETC
BEATING UNBORN CHILD	BLACK EYES
FOCUSSED ATTACKS: ON EAR THAT	SPLIT HEADS
HAD CANCER/ ON SCAR TISSUE AT	SPRAINED ARM
BASE OF SPINE	BROKEN NOSE
TRIED TO CUT PENIS OFF	BROKEN ANKLE
NIPPING	BROKEN COLLAR BONE
SPITTING	EXTENSIVE BRUISING
THROTTLING	CUTS/ SCARRING
STITCHES	BRUISED RIBS
SCALDING	KNOCKED UNCONSCIOUS

Law came to constitute part of the abuse process itself. For example, two respondents claimed that they had been falsely subject to child abuse allegations in order to have them removed from the house. Child abuse accusations guarantee the separation of the man from his children, an accusation difficult to refute. Several respondents felt that the drama was being structured in advance of a formal separation and preparation for a legal case for exclusion and divorce. The aims of such planning might be to obtain a divorce, to exclude the partner from the house – or in two cases to prevent a divorce occurring. One respondent had been reportedly wrongly denounced as a member of a para-military organisation, in possession of guns, to the police. A second claimed he had misleadingly been reported to the para-militaries and beaten up by them. Another complained of a wrongful allegation of marital rape. Several claimed that – perhaps encouraged by a solicitor – their partners had compiled detailed records of alleged misbehaviour by the male, unknown to the latter. All these records could be conflated into an image of “unreasonable behaviour”.

Illustrations

- **You lived in fear. The one thing that I was afraid of, and I used to lock my door, was that she would come up in the middle of the night shouting, “rape”. [James, salesman, 44 years]**
- **She started to make fun of me, says “I’m going to take you to court. Get you out of this house. Get an exclusion order. You’re not going to see the wee one”. [Tony, unemployed, 36 years]**
- **When the axe finally fell, I had nothing documented; I had no evidence, because I didn’t believe it would ever come to that. When I was told that accusations of violence had been levelled at me, I couldn’t believe it. [James, salesman, 44 years]**
- **I have read her diary where she is fabricating stories to her Doctor. She has been planning this for some time, for nearly five years. She has been plotting this, and I honestly believe that the whole idea of it, was to wear me down to the extent of me going and getting legal people. She has written in her diary that I was out drinking last Saturday night and I was drunk or something. She stayed at her mother's because she feared for her life is what she told her doctor. She came back on the Sunday, because she was scared of me changing the locks on the house. [Paul, plumber, 33 years]**

4.2 EFFECTS OF VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

In many ways, the consequences of the conflict were similar to those that characterise the end of any long-term relationship, but in this case exacerbated by the violence and abuse.

Key Points

- ❑ The most severe form of abuse cited by all respondents was emotional victimisation, normally cumulative in character and involving long term trauma, which at the extreme – in two reported cases – led to suicide attempts.
- ❑ Such victimisation could affect respondents' abilities in employment.
- ❑ Several respondents emphasised that one result of such victimisation could result in loss of home and livelihood.
- ❑ Only a few respondents found that in subsequent legal and matrimonial procedures were the courts receptive to the notion of the male as victim.
- ❑ Respondents were emotionally scarred not just because of the direct effects on themselves but also because of their children witnessing such abuse and in some cases, being forced to take sides.
- ❑ Such experiences in several cases affected the individual's ability to develop future relationships with members of the opposite sex. However, others found that such eventual relationships could largely compensate for their experience of partner trauma.

Illustrations

- **It is their baggage that they have with them and you don't know that. I thought I knew my ex-wife, but I didn't know the baggage she carried with her. The way she couldn't let it go and the effect it had on her. [Neil 41 years]**
- **She was in bother - I would get her out of it. She knows that too. All she has to do is lift the phone and we would be there to pull her out of it. Even the children help out. That's the only thing again, family comes first. [John, engineer, 50 years]**
- **If she had three million of the Lottery, knocked on that door and says "there Pet, there's three million of the Lottery, spend it whatever way you want and take me back", I'd turn her down. I don't even want to see her. [Colm, manager, 45 years]**

4.3 MANAGEMENT OF VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

Respondents to a varying extent could 'manage' the coercive abuse. Coping strategies were necessary for several reasons. Abuse severity could mentally destroy the individual. Or its revelation could undermine his image of masculinity in the outside world. Respondents evolved different survival strategies. Some attempted to repress the experience of abuse and to conceal it from the outside world. Others went from pillar to post seeking support from the range of possible voluntary and statutory agencies. Some resorted to alcohol or to sport. Several claimed they managed to "turn the other cheek" while a final group could only deal with the conflict by finally terminating the relationship.

Key points

- ❑ Most respondents attempted to conceal their partner victimisation experiences from public view – variously out of embarrassment, by self-injury to conceal their bruises, or because they believed third parties would not take the abuse.
- ❑ Only a few sought external support, normally from trusted friends.
- ❑ Others attempted to normalise the abuse – believing that it would ease over time.
- ❑ Alcohol was a common resort with no positive effects.
- ❑ Some attempted to use physical exercise to alleviate the domestic travails.
- ❑ Work provided a temporary but unsatisfactory distraction for some respondents.
- ❑ A majority of respondents had terminated the relationship – either through choice by either party or through exhaustion.

4.5 AGENCY REACTIONS

Key Points

- Social Services allegedly provided little of value to the male victims – at best viewing their claims suspiciously and at worse allegedly colluding with the female partner.
- Paradoxically, the same police who were accused until recently of ignoring violence against women were unanimously accused by the male respondents in this survey as being biased in their favour – perhaps due to recent training and legislative development focussed on helping female victims of domestic violence.
- Individual medical practitioners might offer some support if little actual practice.

Since the ‘re-discovery’ of domestic violence some thirty years ago, several voluntary agencies have emerged to support the victims. Statutory agencies have been sensitised to respond. Significant others, from priests to GPs, have added spouse support to their other referral duties. But the picture that emerged from this study was that respondents held the belief that there was a relatively new institutionalisation of attitudes and procedures within statutory agencies that was destined to label the male as the culprit. Respondents also contested that where relevant voluntary organisations existed, with one major exception, they were constructed around the notion of the male as the aggressor. With few exceptions, those interviewed found that voluntary and statutory agencies, which might be expected to provide assistance for abuse victims, were of little or no help where the victim was male. The respondents reported that they encountered unhelpful attitudes such as an implicit or explicit disbelief in the reality of their circumstances; a prior tendency to side with the abusive partner, often pre-judging the man as abusive himself; and a willingness to minimise the abuse suffered by the man on the grounds that he “must have deserved it”. This is especially ironic in that small number of cases where respondents had gone to agencies to seek help for their abusing partners.

housing benefits paying towards mortgage relief and my income support was paying for the house and I was being given pocket money on top of that. It wasn't like a "here comes Saturday, here's your pocket money or whatever". It was on a daily basis. Every morning I got up and said 'Look, you know I need such-and-such". It was ten cigarettes I was allowed a day and there was quotas on what I was allowed and what I wasn't allowed to buy. I didn't really see that as domestic violence at the time but I would now. It got to the point where he was coming in and looking through my pockets, checking receipts to see how much I'd spent. [Ian, student, 32 years]

- The mental abuse, the hiding things, the denying that we had conversations, denying the things that I had trusted him with, that had taken me so much to do, and then him turning around and saying I was lying. That did the damage. The physical stuff, it took me the nine months to get rid of, and the emotional I know I'm still working on because that's a lifelong process. [Sean, social worker, 25 years]
- I didn't have anyone to go to. The most obvious place I would have gone to would have been the police station, to be honest. I would have had to have known or trusted where I was going, that I could just go and be received and to be looked after but not needing to know why or not needing to know answers, but someone to be there to support me, and just help me through it. [Sam, barman, 29 years]
- As single men, I think it's very important that there is provision of housing for single men. At the moment there is provision for housing. But the legislation needs to be changed and certainly the issue needs to be brought more importantly to the public eye and there needs to be some sort of service provider. There's no telephone number in the yellow pages that you can ring up. It might be good for an organisation to exist that actually acknowledges the fact that it happens and for that organisation to have the publicity that goes along with an organisation and having a telephone number that quite clearly states that this is a HelpLine for male victims of domestic violence to bring the idea to the forefront. [Ian, student, 32 years]

