



Family Violence Can Happen to Men Too

A recent study indicates that the proportion of men experiencing “current partner violence” is on the rise

INTRODUCTION

Family violence and abuse is a serious and deeply entrenched problem in Australia. It has a significant impact upon the lives of men, women and children. Domestic violence against men deals with domestic violence experienced by men or boys in an intimate relationship such as marriage, cohabitation, dating, or within a family.

WHAT IS FAMILY VIOLENCE?

The Australia Bureau of Statistics notes that there is no single agreed definition of domestic violence. The *Family Law Act 1975*, however, defines domestic violence as ‘violent, threatening or other behaviour by a person that coerces or controls a member of the person’s family, or causes the family member to be fearful’.

The term can be altered by each state’s local legislation and can broaden the spectrum of domestic violence, such as in Victoria, where family-like relationships and witnessing any type of violence in the family is defined as a family violence. In Queensland law, domestic violence originally referred only to intimate partner violence. In Tasmanian legislation, family violence refers only to partner violence.

Therefore, to refer to domestic violence, in Australia, states chose to name them differently. As such, In Australia domestic violence, depending on the state, it is called “domestic violence”, “family violence”, and “domestic violence”.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST MEN

The result of the Personal Safety Survey (PSS) conducted by a Men’s Right Activist website and released in early 2018, indicates that the proportion of men experiencing current partner violence from 2005 and 2016 has increased more than five-fold. In addition, the Australian Institute of Criminology Homicide (AICH) report shows that every third victim of intimate partner violence is a male. The AICH report also shows that domestic homicide results in one man being killed every 10 days. This is because women are more likely to use weapons in domestic abuse, hence their violence can also be lethal.

Further, the Queensland Government Department of Communities (2009) reported that 40% of domestic and family violence protection orders issues by the Magistrate Court were issued to protect males. Also, a study of risk factors for recent domestic physical assault in patients presenting to the emergency department of Adelaide hospitals found that 7% of male patients had experienced domestic physical assault. This finding indicates that one in three victims were male (39.7%), which supports the result in the AICH report.



IMPACT ON MALE VICTIMS

The impact of family violence on male victims include: fear and loss of feelings of safety; feelings of guilt/and/or shame; difficulties in trusting others; anxiety and flashbacks; unresolved anger; loneliness and isolation; low self-esteem and/or self-hatred; depression; use of alcohol or other drugs to cope with the abuse; physical injuries; sexual dysfunction and/or impotence; loss of work; loss of income; physical illness; loss of contact with children; and etc.

The Australian Institute of Family Studies evolution of the 2006 family law reforms (2009) found that 39% (more than one in three) victims of physical hurt before separation were male; and 48% (almost one in two) victims of emotional abuse before or during separation were male.

Additionally, male victims of family violence often find it distressing to see social marketing campaigns such as Violence Against Women Australia Says No (Federal) and Don't Cross the Line (SA), which suggest that men are the only perpetrators of family violence and women and children the only victims.

WHY ARE MEN LESS LIKELY TO REPORT VIOLENCE?

Whereas women who experience domestic violence tend to be encouraged to report it to the authorities, it is argued that men who experience such violence may encounter pressure against reporting, with those that do face social stigma noting their perceived lack of machismo and other denigration of their masculinity. Additionally, intimate partner violence (IPV) against men is generally less recognised by society than IPV against women, which can act as a further clock to men reporting their situation.

The PSS shows that men are too afraid to report violence by their female partner, or they think that the police would not take them seriously. Dr Salter stated that men can report degrading violence by men but somehow they are terrified to report violence by their female partner.

MALE VICTIMS LACK SUPPORT

While many services have been established over the past four decades to support female victims of family violence, the needs of male victims remain largely unmet. Historically government policies have been based on the assumption that the vast majority of perpetrators are male and the vast majority of victims are female, and the policies of current government are still based on this erroneous position.

The National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children did not include male victims in their otherwise laudable March 2009 recommendations which have been enthusiastically supported by the federal government and the council of Australian Governments.

CONCLUSION

The Personal Safety Survey is not only timely, but eye-opening and warrants further consideration.