

**DUBLIN BUSINESS SCHOOL**

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**Male Victims of Domestic Abuse**

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## ***Abstract***

Domestic abuse is one of the biggest human rights violations that effects women and children all over the world. It has no regard for age, race or creed. It has reached such proportions that women seem to be more at risk in the home than on the streets.

But what of male victims?

The objective of this research project is to look at men in the role of victim of domestic abuse. Some organisations suggest that men are only victims when they are the aggressors. It has also been suggested that male victims are as abundant as female victims. In this research it was found that men are victims in many cases of domestic abuse. It was found also that they faced many obstacles when it came to reporting the abuse. From the stigma attached to the male as being the stronger dominant sex, to help lines that accuse men of being the perpetrator when they call for help.

A study of one mans experience at the hands of his abusive wife showed that the most prominent feature of under reporting is the fear many men have of ridicule and disbelief . The research will show how emotional abuse is the most difficult. Taking the step toward therapy is not an easy one for men but research shows that talking and group therapy does have a positive effect on the male victims of domestic abuse.

## ***Introduction***

When 'Male' and 'Domestic Violence' are mentioned in the same sentence most people will automatically assume that the male is the perpetrator of the violence and in many cases they are. But more and more men are becoming the victims of violence in the home. There are some who would argue that women only become violent when retaliating against their aggressor.

This object of this paper is to look at male victims and how they cope with the difficult situation they often find themselves in. How they feel about disclosing the abuse. What are they faced with and how society treats them and this ever growing problem?. As they begin the long road to recovery how does therapy fit in to their lives?

In order to obtain information it is important to go to the heart of the problem. A victim is the only one who really knows the problem. A victim, and a survivor of terrible mental and physical abuse will be brave enough to open his life for this research and take part in a case study.

By meeting people who work on the front line with victims and try to help them rebuild shattered lives and regain some lost sense of self worth will help explore what it is that makes it so difficult for men to report the abuse they are suffering.

## *Literature Review*

A dog, a woman and a Walnut tree, the more you beat 'em the better they'll be"

Rhyming Quincey on his jail sentence for beating his wife

"If you cant join them, Beat them"

J Edgar Hoover

In the following research project the author will examine the issue of Domestic Violence. The main focus will be on male victims and the problems that they often face when looking for help and support in their time of great need. AMEN are a support group founded in 1997 by Mary Cleary. They have a confidential help line and are there to assist in many ways. Domestic violence is crippling. There are so many stories that show the tragedy of violence in the home. Some people who claim to love their partner or spouse, continue to violate them in so many ways.

The law is there to protect victims of violence but what can the law do when the victims are too ashamed to seek their help. When society tells these people that they do not live up to what is expected of their gender? Men are told they should never hit a woman it is not the accepted thing to do and it certainly is not. So when a man is been beaten, bitten, stabbed and emotionally destroyed where can he go in a society that tells him to "take it like a man"?

Through the course of this research the author found that little is known about the needs of men who are victims of domestic violence. These men mainly suffer in silence. The fear of not being believed by a society who still refute the now known fact that women can be perpetrators of violence in home.

Violence between partners and within marriage has been problematic for centuries.

From the first law of marriage proclaimed by Romulus in 75 BC through the early 20th century, legal and institutional support for wife beating can be found. The feminist movement starting in the 1960s, the victim witness movement of the 1970s, and the availability of empirical evidence accelerated public attention to the legal and procedural barriers that existed between safety for women and the de facto right to beat one's wife (Danis 2003)

Domestic abuse has played a part in the lives of men and women since records began. It has been recognised as far back as Medieval times. Its roots go back to the very foundation of so-called civil society (Fee, Brown and Lazarus 2002). In the Europe of that time men had the right to chastise their women, physically discipline. An image found from a 1582 print edition of the 13<sup>th</sup> century *Regimen Sanitatis Salernitarum* (Salernitan Regimen of Health) shows a domestic assault as it was frequently represented in medieval and modern Europe (A man beats a woman with a stick) Here it was assumed that the matter was individual and private, the consequence of the hot-tempered “choleric” disposition of an angry and poorly controlled man. ( Fee et al 2002) There is an old saying and that is “ The rule of thumb”, most people believe it means a rough and ready method of estimating,

originally used by wood workers to measure wood. It has also got a darker history and that was that it was acceptable to beat your wife just as long as the stick was no thicker than your thumb. Christina Hoff Sommers 1994, says that the darker side of the explanation is not referred to in legal writings. It was said to be referred to in the famous legal commentaries of William Blackstone. However as Sommers notes there is no mention in Blackstone of the 'rule of thumb'. The following discussion is mentioned though "The husband also, by the old law might give his wife moderate correction ...in the same moderation that a man is allowed to correct his apprentices or children... but in the politer reign of Charles the second this power of correction is doubted and a wife may now have the security of the peace against her husband" (Blackstone 2005 ;72)

In seventeenth century Holland, women were allowed to start legal proceedings against their husbands for maltreatment. Grotius, (van der Heijden, 2000 ;632), argued that "Husbands who abused their rights of legal guardianship by treating their wives with cruelty should be brought to court. Furthermore fines should be imposed the first time a husband is brought to court for maltreatment". Foreign visitors were quite surprised to find that the Dutch people frowned upon wife beating. The Journal of Social History relates many examples of abuse by husbands on their wives including rape and molestation. But it also states how difficult it was for women who did prosecute their husbands. A convicted husband could not provide for his wife and children. One such husband who had defiled his wife wrote to her to beg her to stop proceedings but when she would not he played to her fear of hunger and shame. He wrote; "Do thou then want the eternal destruction and ruination of me and of you and all ours?, do not grieve us anymore. It is yet enough, do not

let it go any further” He said she had to help him out of “guilt and shame”, because otherwise “We shall be criminalised” . Furthermore he warned that, “ We wont keep a penny in the world and what will thou begin when I am gone?” ( van der Heijden, 2000).

In the courts of that time rape and assault of single women was considered a serious crime. The victim statement and reports from family and neighbours were taken into consideration by the judge, loss of honour seemed to be play an important roll in these cases ( van der Heijden 2000). The loss of honour was mentioned in all sentence notes of rape, defamation or maltreatment in single young women. However judges showed a different attitude to rape and maltreatment of married women. The sentence notes were few and statements from neighbours and family were not included. Often times the victims had equal blame put upon them for their own rape (van der Heijden 2000). There is no mention in this article of the maltreatment or abuse of young boys or men.

Domestic violence was not prevalent in the public eye until the 1970’s when the Battered Women’s movement was founded. Erin Pizzey (2001) helped start the first women’s shelter in 1971, Chiswick, England. In the early 1970’s there were only two shelters for battered women in the United States- now there are some 2000. There is a 24 hour helpline, government funding, state and national laws have been passed to protect battered women. There has been progress but the problem still remains. Four million American women experience assault every year (2001)

Whilst conducting this research the author has found a lot of information on women who suffer Domestic Violence. It is a world wide problem and more needs to be done to protect

women in this situation. While the situation is nightmarish, the issue of domestic violence suffered by men is much less researched. Battered men are as vulnerable as women in this situation but their problem is not in the public domain as much as women's. There are many reasons for this.

The study of women who are abusive to their partners has only recently emerged from its "cloak of secrecy" (Steinmetz and Lucca as cited by, Babcock and Miller, 1988).

British Crime Survey of 1996 (Mirrlees-Black. & Byron.), showed that women using violence towards their partner is on the increase. 4.2% of men and 4.2% of women reported they had been physically assaulted in the last year. These figures show that domestic abuse is not a single gender issue. This problem has been made worse by the media. Women are often portrayed as using violence without any recriminations.

Even newspaper comic articles show women as being violent to their spouse with no consequence. Research showed twenty consecutive editions of all comic strips in nine New York cities newspapers in October, 1950 were examined. Results reveal that husbands were victims of aggression in 63% of conflict situations,- while wives were victims in 39% of situations. In addition wives were more aggressive in 73% of domestic situations, 10% of situations husband and wives were equally aggressive and in only 17% of situations husbands were more aggressive (Fiebert 1997) This comical portrayal of domestic violence can only damage the work that is being done to help victims. As this statistic is from 1963 such comical portrayal might not be accepted now. But it shows that violence on males by their spouse was prevalent. The puppet show of Punch and Judy

also portray violence in the home as acceptable and even funny. Children are encouraged to cheer when this family beat each other with sticks. Even the baby is beaten.

Some critics argue that violence by women is only in self defence or retaliation (Kurz,1993: Pleck, Pleck, Grossman and Bart, 1977), and therefore our real concern should be violence against women. Some researchers argue that although violence by men leads to worse injuries it must still be acknowledge that women are capable of violence too. The researchers point towards several studies. The majority of women do not cite self defence as a motive for violence against their male partners, but rather anger, jealousy, retaliation for emotional hurt, efforts to gain control and dominance and confusion (Cate, Henton, Koval, Christopher and Loyde1982; Felson and Messner, 2000; Follingstad, Wright, Lloyd and Sebastian1991,Makepeace1981). Half of all violent arguments are initiated by women (Strause and Gelles1988) In approximately 50% of violent relationships the violence is mutual, 25% the violence is perpetrated by only the male and 25% perpetrated by only the female (Struas and Gelles1988)

On average men do not have more power than women in American families (Hines, 1980)Thus these researchers argue that domestic violence needs to be viewed as a human problem not a gender problem in the absence of conclusive data and based on substantial research. It nevertheless appears that whether they are heterosexual, or Gay (Renzetti and Miley, 1996), or transsexual ( Brown 2007) and no matter what their age, physical ability, socioeconomic or ethnic background both men and women are subject to Intimate Partner Abuse (IPA) and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) (Allen-Collinsworth

2009 ;22)

A study carried out by The National Crime Council of Ireland in association with the Economic and Social Research Institute, found that one in seven of Irish women and one in sixteen of Irish men have experienced severe abusive behaviour of a physical, sexual or emotional nature from a partner some time in their lives. While the author recognises the abusive and violent behaviour that many women have suffered and are still suffering at the hands of men, this work will be looking at the issues surrounding the problem of men who are victims of women in domestic abuse and violence.

A definition of domestic abuse as cited by Martin and Law 2006, is defined as the “intentional application of physical force to an individual without their consent” However according to Kelly (1999) there is a distinct difference between domestic violence and domestic abuse. Domestic violence suggests aggression and physical harm while abuse encompasses a wider range of behaviour such as sexual, emotional, financial and psychological abuse encompassing aggression, intimidation, unwanted and non-consensual sexual attention and humiliation.

Henning and Feder, cited Straus (1977-1978) state that for all violent acts during the survey year, there is only a slightly higher incidence for husbands than wives ... and data on severe violence suggests that the wives were more violent even in this traditional sense of the word”. Also at this same period Steinmetz (1977) randomly selected 57 families and had them keep diaries of all the conflicts in the family unit. Like Straus she found very high rates of family violence. And also like Straus, she concluded that men and women

might have equal potential for violent marital interaction ( Henning and Feder 2004)

Contemporary research shows that men are less likely to report incidents than women, 5% of men severely abused compared to 29% of women (Report on the National Study of Domestic Abuse 2008) Some of the reasons that men are less likely to report are that their injuries often do not require medical attention and their belief that their complaint will not be taken seriously (Report on the National Study of Domestic Abuse).

A study of Male Victims of Domestic Violence, commissioned by AMEN argued that when the 55% of men who did not seek help from the Gardai were asked why, 80% felt that they would not be taken seriously and 77% said they feared ridicule and felt ashamed. Also according to the Amen study 2004, incidents of violence are not disclosed due to the fact that some men fear being perceived as “weak”, being treated as a joke. The incidents of men reporting domestic violence to the Gardai is 11% as per the garda annual report 1998.

The most unreported crime is Husband Abuse, (Langly and Levy 1977) The reasons Sarantakos (1991) cites for this under-reporting are the same in Australia as the Irish report being the fear of not being believed, of being ridiculed and laughed at and actually becoming the one who is blamed for the violence. Sarantakos (1999) argues that there are other factors involved with this lack of disclosure, such as men are more likely to play down the seriousness of the problem, and consider it not serious enough to talk about, let alone report it to the authorities. They can also be dependent on the abuser and feeling powerless. It can at times feel impossible to talk about the abuse or abuser even to friends

and family. The victim would be traumatised and often consider it improper and demeaning to admit that they are not in a position to take care of themselves and need help to deal with family problems, knowing that admitting their plight will have no effect on their status (Sarantakos 1999).

Allen-Collinson (2009), argues that no matter whether female or male, it appears that one of the central reasons for victims under-reporting to the police, social services, friends and family, is the stigma, embarrassment and even culpability often associated with this form of abuse. She also cites Connell and Messerschmidt 2005 who argued that the requirements' of contemporary "hegemonic masculinity" strongly censor male victimisation by women so that any admission that one has been beaten up by one's wife is an admission that one is not "really" a man (Allen-Collinsworth, 2009 ;31)

Men are usually viewed as being physically and emotionally stronger than women. This adds to the problem they have in reporting and seeking help for their problems with abusive wives of partners. Often men feel unable to define their experience of Domestic Violence because of the perception that society has of men being physically and emotionally stronger than women ( Barber 2008)

Many men are re-traumatised through their dealings with domestic violence services. Volunteers who are not trained or aware of the growing problem of male victims of domestic abuse can unknowingly re-traumatise the victim. A caller reported his treatment from a domestic abuse agency to DAHM (Domestic Abuse Helpline for Men), they

confirmed when they questioned this that the first response from the agency supervisor was “Why would a man call a helpline if he were not the abuser” ( Hines et al 2002).

“The most unreported crime is not wife beating”, argues Suzanne Steinmetz, a sociology professor at Indiana University-Purdue, Indianapolis, an expert on family issue (Marriot 2003 ) “It’s husband beating, men are not willing to come forward to say what happened. They’ll say it was an accident”

Denise A. Hines showed in her study that after trying to get help through domestic help lines, men who found the DAHM, reported that they were left feeling frustrated and despondent. A lot of the time they were again faced with the fact of not being believed and being made to feel that it was it was they them selves who were the abusers (Hines, 2002)

Inadequate support networks Lawrence (2003), as cited by Barber CF, found that support resources and networks that are available for female victims of domestic violence are not available for male victims. For example there are shelters and safe homes to protect women and their children from violent male partners, but these are not available to men.

George and Yarwood (2004) showed the police response to reported domestic abuse from men as follows; Threatened with arrest 47%, Ignored by police 35%,

Arrested 21%, and the violent female partner that had been arrested 3%.

The SAVI report, (Sexual Abuse and Violence Ireland 2002) states that disclosure to professionals was strikingly low regarding experiences of adult sexual assault, only one

man (of 98 abused, i.e. 1 per cent) and 7.8% of women had reported their experiences to the Gardai.

The help agency AMEN, conducted a survey on the victims who sought help from them. It was commissioned by AMEN and supported by Area Development Management Ltd and the Combat Poverty Agency through the EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation. Their findings show that domestic violence toward men had a profound effect on their mental health.

There are many letters written from victims relaying the torment they suffered but what stands out more than any other problem is the damage the men suffer mentally. Such as “I felt worthless, I thought I deserved this treatment because I was not good enough”. One letter from a woman tells of the suicide of her partner of three years after a previous abusive marriage. He couldn't speak of the pain he was feeling. The emotional abuse was too much for him to carry alone. Maybe with help, this man could have lived in a new happier relationship? Is it possible that if he had, or been able to access a service with therapeutic help, he might have regained his sense of worth? That he might have been empowered to look beyond the stigma of male domestic abuse.

Although the current research does not in any way refute the problem of domestic violence against women and the horrific abuse women suffer at the hands of men, it does however show that men suffer at the hands of their spouse and partners. But with the added problem of not being believed and also having to face ridicule from the people they seek help from. Often men have to face prejudice because of the fact that they are accusing

women of abusive behaviours. They face this in some institution such as the healthcare system, the social welfare system and the legal profession. There are no refuges for men. They are often made to leave their homes for their own safety and many spend their nights in their car or work or on a friends couch. There is no one to talk to for them in this position, no support. The horror of having to leave their children behind with someone they know is capable of violence can be devastating.

To examine how men cope and the difficulties they face the author will conduct a case study on a victim of female domestic abuse. He is in his forties and has 3 children. He was referred by the organisation AMEN. He is a professional man and was high ranking in his job This abuse went on for many years until his wife passed away. He struggled to keep his children safe. The case study will be anonymous

## ***Methodology***

In this research the author will be using The Biographic Narrative method. The narrative will form the basis of a case study This is a qualitative method of research. When Men are abused by their spouse/partner, 1.Why do they find it hard to report domestic abuse? 2. What problems they face when they do?, 3.What part does psychotherapy play in the recovery process of abused men if any?

(See appendix A,B,C)

The logic behind concentrating efforts on one case rather than many is that there may be

insights to be gained from looking at the individual case that can have wider implications and, importantly, that would not have come to light through the use of a research strategy that tried to cover a large number of instances (Denscombe 2003 ;31)

This situation is a very delicate and personal experience. Many people are severely damaged by abuse in the home so to approach without reference would not be appropriate. The person who has participated in this case study was referred by AMEN. This is an organisation set up to help men when they are abused by their wife or partner. It was set up in by Mary Cleary. They have a help line, accompany men to court appearances and are available to assist where ever possible. It was ensured that he was willing and well enough to do this project. The data that was collected is very personal. Also from the research it shows how difficult it is for men to report so allowing this case study is exceptionally brave.

‘The case study approach allows the researcher to deal with the subtleties and intricacies of complex social situations. In particular it enables the researcher to grapple with relationships and social processes in a way that is denied with the survey approach. The analysis is holistic rather than based on isolated factors (Denscombe 2003 ;38) An interview allows the researcher a personal view of what the subject has endured. It is difficult for men who are abused to relay their emotions and feelings as the research has shown. It is vital that the interviewer be aware of this and take into accrued the psychological effect remembering and recounting can have on the person being interviewed.

If the question was a numerical one it could be answered by a quantitative study. For example (Patten 2002;14) argues that “if you want to know how much people weigh then use a scale. If you want to know if they are obese measure body fat in relation to height and weight and compare the results to the population norm. If you want to know what their weight means to them and how it effects them, how they think about it and what they do about it then you need to talk to them, find out their experiences, and hear their stories”

The case that forms the basis of the investigation is something that already exists. It is not a situation that is artificially generated specifically for the purposes of research. Unlike an experiment where the research design is dedicated to imposing controls on variables so that the impact of a specific ingredient can be measured. As Yin (1994) stresses, “the case is a naturally occurring phenomenon. It exists prior to the research project and will continue to exist once the research project is finished” ( Bell 2005 ;31).

One major advantage using an interview is that the researcher can probe responses and follow up on ideas motives and feelings which the questionnaire can never especially with such a sensitive subject. “The way in which the interviewee responds with facial expressions and body language can provide information that a written response might conceal. Written response have to be taken at face value, but a response in an interview can be developed and clarified” (Bell 2005 ;157)

The research shows that there is as much male abuse as female but its what it does and how

it effects their lives that is the purpose of this research. The scientific benefit of case studies lies in its ability to open the way for discoveries (Berg 2005 ; 294,Shaughnessy).

Berg (2005 ;291) speaks of Instrumental case studies, which provide insights into an issue or refine a theoretical expiation, making it more generalised. The case study serves as a supportive role a background against which the actual research interests will play out.

This particular interviewee was chosen because his experiences will give the reader a better understanding of the research.

The case study will consist of an interview with the person. His name will be Damien for purposes of the research. It will be recorded and typed verbatim and will look at the history and life of Damien. It will start with looking at where and when the abuse began. What services were available to him and how he was treated. Damien's psychological and emotional state as a result of the abuse and what resources did he find to help him to recover and continue with his life. The interview will be held in a private place and last approximately one hour. It will be difficult to put an exact time as the subject is a social one. In a face to face interview like this Denscombe (1995 ;8) says "the researcher can sense if she is being given false information in the face to face context in a way that is not possible with the questionnaire and less feasible with telephone surveys".

A list of questions will be used as guidance. An interview guide lists the questions and issues that are to be explored in the course of the interview. "Freedom to allow the respondent to talk about what is of central significance to them rather than to the

interviewer is clearly important, but some loose structure to ensure all topics which are considered crucial to the study are covered eliminate the problems of entirely unstructured interviews. The guided or focused interview fulfils these requirements” (Bell, 2005 ;161)

Patton (2002 ;343) argues that the advantage of an interview guide is that it makes sure the interviewer/evaluator has carefully decided how best to use the limited time available in an interview situation.

There are ethical issues involved in this methodology. It is vital that the interviewee be informed of what exactly happens in the interview, where the tape will be kept and how his responses will be used.

Complete anonymity in this work will be assured and guaranteed to Damien. Hart and Bond (Bell, 2005 ;44) devised some examples of different types of codes of practice or protocol that can be read out at the start of an interview which require researchers to ensure that participants are fully aware of the purpose of the interview and understand their rights. They explain that participants can refuse to answer questions and can stop the interview at any time. This protocol will be used at the start of the interview with Damien and he will be made fully aware that he can stop at any time.

This methodology will show the damage and pain caused to a man because he was abused by his wife. It will confirm the research that shows how men are re traumatised when they seek help and are turned away. The effect of being separated from their children and the

stigma attached to male abuse.

The list of questions used for this case study and any other interview will be included in an appendix along with the consent form.

## ***Discussion***

### ***Male Victims and their Reluctance to Report Abuse.***

For the purpose of research the author conducted a case study on Damien. He has consented to this and is happy to be quoted for this research. Damien is in his forties and the father of three children. He was born and reared in the west of Ireland from a large family who are farmers. His father and mother were supportive when he went for a career outside of the farm. He said his family are quiet people. His father was an occasional drinker with alcohol not allowed in the home. He feels he had a generally happy upbringing and has fond memories of his childhood. He never saw or experienced violence, physical or mental abuse in the home.

He moved to Dublin to pursue his career. Damien met his wife in a club in the capital. The relationship flourished and they were married. Their first child was born after fifteen years. During this time Damien would see his wife as being a bit abusive when drunk. She maltreated him but he says "I always just hoped she would stop. I prayed that she would settle down and we would have a happy life together, but sure it was not to be" He says

that when the children came along it just got worse. Her physical and mental abuse of him escalated. So much so he was forced to sleep in his car on occasion and once he slept in the local bus shelter just to get away from the abuse.

He explains with great compassion in his voice how his wife was addicted to alcohol, “It got to a stage when she would drink anything, wine beer anything and it was then that it would get unbearable altogether and that’s when I got most of my scars. I have many many scars on my body. I remember once she got so mad at me she threw a cup of scolding coffee into my face. I had to go to work with a big red face and it stinging so bad. The lies I had to tell and the excuses to cover up the abuse” When the question was asked about bringing charges against his wife Damien leaned back in his chair, folded his arms, took a deep breath and sighed saying “Sure who would have ever believed me? I did not believe anyone would even take me seriously. I went to ALANON. There I was, a strapping big fella with my high powered job and responsibilities crying because my little slip of a wife was beating me” Shaking his head he said “ye see, it’s the shame of it, the terrible shame I felt and I had done nothing wrong”

The research shows that most men find it difficult if not impossible to report the abuse from their wife or partner. In the main it is because of the fear of not being believed and of being ridiculed. The Report on the National Study of Domestic Abuse (2001) found, that often men do not report because their injuries do not require medical attention and their belief that their complaint will not be taken seriously.

The fear of being considered weak stops men from coming forward. In Damien's case he felt that if it ever got out that his wife abused him it would not only affect him as a man but in the eyes of his superiors in work he would not be able to move through his job and get promotion. He says "I believed I would have been laughed at and demeaned. Sure how could they promote me with all that going on? I'm really sorry now that I did not talk back then maybe things would not have gotten so bad for me and my children, if I could have trusted someone, but I just carried on cleaning up the mess as I go " Even friends and family were kept away and as with all abusers his wife separated him as much as possible from the people around him who cared for Damien. So he also felt alienated and alone. The report by the National Crime Council (2001) shows that 29% of women and only 5% of men report to the Garda. The incidents of men reporting to the Gardai is 11%

This shows how difficult it is for men. It is a horrifying experience for any person suffering at the hands of an abuser but to have the added fear of being ridiculed only enhances the stigma to be made to feel inadequate. " any admission that one has been beaten up by ones wife is an admission that one is not "really" a man (Allen-Collinson 2009) A book of letters from victims and their families published by AMEN shows beyond a doubt that reporting abuse is a massive obstacle for the victim to face.

### ***Psychological Tools for Abuse***

Research has found that one of the biggest tools abusers use to control their victims is the love of their children. Many fathers then have doubts in their mind as to the truth of this. It can be expensive and difficult to have DNA testing done. If there is then an abuse allegation on top of this the father can be extremely frightened and at a loss of what to do.

False allegation is one of the most damaging aspects of this kind of abuse. It is not uncommon for a wife to accuse her husband of hurting their children and her. When in fact it is she who is the abuser. Damien speaks of this as the worst time of all with his wife. She accused him of abusing their children and made a report to the garda.

Damien says that it was horrifying “The children were with me for 10 weeks while they investigated. Then they were taken into care. It was awful. I used to wake up in a cold sweat thinking about my children I love them so much it was killing me not seeing them”

Eventually after a report from the garda, social workers and a psychiatrist Damien got full custody of his three children. He told of how he felt being accused on hurting his little children. It got stuck in his throat he says “I felt like I was going to choke”

In the Irish Family Law system children are regularly separated from their parents against their will, contrary to the child’s best interests. One victim who eventually got full custody of his children from his violent wife tells “ There was a row in the house. She hit me with an ashtray. There was blood everywhere. One of the neighbours called the garda. When they came she told them I had hit her. I tried to tell them the truth but they did not even listen. It was beyond their capacity to believe a little woman like that could possible hit a big lad like me. But the worst experience of my life was looking out of the garda car window, my wife was at the porch, one of my children was trying to come with me in the car and the other lay crying in her arms. I was being taken away and leaving my vulnerable little girls in the hands of a violent drunken woman. Though I have custody that picture still haunts me every time I close my eyes”

One million children become the victims of divorce every year (Cleary 2007 ;149). There was a time when people would stay together for the sake of the children and men and women suffered in silence so as not to be seen to be failing in their marriage. Children can be used in the fight between mothers and fathers. But many arrangements between parents work well. Weekends are set up and parents cooperate with each and make the best of a very difficult situation. The notion of holding children hostage to gain the upper hand or to cause pain to another person is abhorrent but Cleary states that some women learn to hate their ex-partners more than they love their children so denying access to a father can possibly do severe damage to the child. A government survey found that 40% of single mothers admitted to using contact with her children as a weapon against their fathers (Cleary). President Bush stated that “children who grow up fatherless can often suffer lasting damage, they are more likely to end up in poverty or drop out of school, become addicted to drugs. Have a child out of wedlock or end up in prison. Fatherlessness is not the only cause of this but our nation must recognise it as an important factor” (President G.W. Bush June 2000 as cited in Cleary ;150).

Many men feel that even though they have been proven innocent of any wrongdoing the very fact that the accusation was brought is unbearable for them. The old saying “Mud sticks” comes to mind. This victim has now had to defend himself from his abuser, and now he feels he has to defend himself from a society who will ridicule him and see him as weak. Often its difficult for him to prove his innocence. It can be one persons word against another. Damien said “I always felt that no matter what, I was defending myself all of the time, at home, in the courts and when it all got out I used to feel I had to defend myself to

people in the street. The worst part of it all is that I was innocent, an innocent man and had done nothing wrong but love my wife and children. I was the one paying for my wife's behaviour and here I was defending myself against the very courts that are supposed to protect me and my children"

In Cleary's book (;152) there is an email forwarded by a service user to Amen. It is from his wife who had previously made false allegations

*"I know you're a good man and have always stood by your family. I needed time out when I got the barring order and that's why I did it. I know you don't drink and the kids adore you but I did need time out. I told you that if we got back together I'd always do what ever I want and see whoever I like. I will do what I want*

*You either accept that or move on with your life. You might think I can't get you out of the house as easy next time but I can if I tell the police you forced yourself on me, you'll be gone for good. Even your solicitor told you that the court always believes the wife. I showed you that I'd get the house and the kids. I get the house and most of your money. You can see the kids when I decide. So watch what you say or I'll f..king destroy you*

*Happy xmas,*

*Suzie"*

## *Using Sexuality as a Weapon for Abuse*

John Moffett is a psychotherapist who works with male and female victims and sits on the committee of Amen. He was involved at the beginning when Mary Cleary set up the organisation. In an interview with this author he explained what damage can be done to these people, he says “ The anxiety and stress of it all can bring these men to such difficult places. Often it can lead to the abuse of alcohol or drugs to help them cope with the pain that they are feeling. It can be nearly impossible for them to confide in anyone as

their trust has been terribly abused. Their sense of self and dignity has been crushed”

He says that in his experience of working with abused men they are suffering from low self esteem, their sense of self worth and depression. He talks about how women often use sex to humiliate their victims and so keeping control. Damien relates how his abuser made him feel he says “She told me I was no good at sex. She kept telling me that I didn’t know how to make love to her and I was not a man. I lost every bit of confidence I had. She’d say ‘who would want you your only a queer’. My brother is gay and sure she had a field day with that one. ‘Your queer like your brother”

She used this form of abuse against Damien so much he then began to believe her and completely lost his confidence. He says that even when the marriage was over he couldn’t talk to a woman. He was afraid he could not have sex. He felt he had to prove to himself that he could. He went out purposely one night to get a woman, “ It was terrible, a real nightmare I could not talk to women because I did not know how to be. I kept thinking they could see inside me. Jesus I remember the first time a woman said hi are you buying me a

drink? I froze, I just thought oh no not again, this woman is probably the same. It was so hard I felt deflated ” He could not speak to her and he left as quickly as he could. This experience really frightened Damien. He felt that he would never be able to have a relationship again. He also said that he was frightened to begin any new relationship because his confidence in his own sexuality was so badly damaged.

John Moffett refers to this as being the catalyst at times for the breakdown of the mental health of the victim. To hit at the very core of his manhood. This is something that is so difficult for men to talk about. And if they are using alcohol or drugs to self medicate then their sexual desire will be inhibited making things worse again. Another example from Mary Clearys book shows how words can be as devastating as the fist, “I remember one time she just sat up in bed with her arms folded, she said repeatedly ‘if you only knew what my lesbian lovers did it might make you at least tolerable in bed’. Another time she punched me while I was lying in the bath and insisted I go to the toilet while she watched. I refused so she waited till I had to go and ridiculed me for not flushing a few times during a sitting” (Cleary, That Bitch ;45 2007)

Psychological abuse can be as damaging if not worse than physical violence. In France recently it was put to the government that psychological violence should be punished.

“ The French government are considering the introduction of a law to punish those who repeatedly insult or threaten their spouse or partner. The proposed law which would make ‘psychological violence a criminal offence, is aimed mainly at protecting women from threats and intimidation in the family home. It would apply to husbands and wives as well

as cohabitating couples. Police would be urged to issue a caution in the first instance of a reported crime but repeat offenders could face a fine, electronic tagging or jail. Prime minister Francois Fillon said “ It is an important move forward as the creation of this offence will let us tackle the most insidious situations, the ones that leave no physical scars but still injure the victims inside’ Reports suggest the law could cover every kind of slur from repeated rude remarks about a partners appearance and false allegations of infidelity to threats of physical violence.

Sceptics however have suggested that verbal violence could in some cases be impossible to prove and questioned how the law could be enforced. Harassment of the sort the proposed law aims to punish when it occurs in private life has been an offence on professional settings since 2002 (Ruadhan Mac Cormaic, Irish Times, Jan,7 2010)

The French prime minister recognises the terrible hurt and pain caused by emotional abuse. It is so much more difficult if the person who is inflicting the pain is the same person who shares your home and bed. But if there was a law that recognises this problem it could possibly assist people when they are disclosing the mental abuse to see that it is against the law.

John Moffett speaks of victims as “Very wounded people. Men find it so much more difficult to speak about the problem. I’m not saying its any worse or better for women but they do tend to be able to talk and open up a little easier than men. Of course there is the macho image that men are often forced to adhere to. From a therapeutic point in my experience, I have found that men who are abused and find the strength to go to therapy

really benefit from it. They can learn to transform their pain. To look at life again and to realise their own sense of self worth. But what is mostly needed from the therapist is belief time to listen and to understand. It is only a very short step from despair to suicide and many men in my experience who have been abused consider this as an option, many quoting that it is their children that stop them” When asked what he sees as the biggest problem “Ignorance, lack of information and understanding. It needs to be shown that this is not a small problem it is endemic. And it is a gender problem. It is the disbelief that stops men disclosing the abuse and so enabling the abuser to carry on. We need awareness and places where men and women can source help and information. Therapy should be made more accessible to everyone who needs it. People need to understand that the damage mental abuse does to men women and children”

Mary Cleary, who is the co author of *That Bitch* and founder of Amen began this work as a nurse. She noticed so many men being treated in the ER for minor and major injuries inflicted on them by their wives and girlfriends. Often she found these men would lie about where the injury came from. Mary knew that much of the damage could not have been an accident. She travelled with the ambulance crew and saw first hand that on occasion injuries were sustained by men. Mary does not for one minute take away from the women who suffer at the hands of abusive men, she simply wants it in the open that women can be violent and abusive to their husbands and partners just as much.

She is a strong lady and when she speaks it is with conviction and care. Her schedule is always full as she travels around giving lectures about abuse and training people in the public system. She speaks of some of the situations she has been dealing with. Showing pictures of horrific injuries inflicted on men by their wives and partners.

She speaks of suicide and her concern that so many men look in that direction. “ When they are prevented from seeing their children its like a Parent-actomy. Their pain is so great. People just cannot see what is happening. The fear of losing their children, of being demeaned and ridiculed can all get to much and they see suicide as a way out, if I had a cent.....” She talks about the fantastic people that work in Amen but their lack of funding is a major problem. They run a support group once a week and it is a great success. This is what one man had to say about the group

“ to all men who come to Amen.... You need to become aware of your own inner self. As men never check for lumps and bumps on our physical body and we should and we never check for lumps and bumps or growths on our minds or spiritual self. Thank you all so much for being there for giving me a light to see my own self”

Mary explains “It is the psychological damage that is done and these men are re-traumatized when they are reaching for help and are met by people who believe that women are not violent, well they are. And good, honest, loving, gentle men are suffering at their hands. People need to be aware of this terrible problem. There is a great need for it to be shown in the true light of what it is- a gender problem. It is not exclusive and affects every race and creed, rich and poor. Awareness is needed. There is now irrefutable

evidence that men and women can both be perpetrators and victims of domestic abuse”

Damien’s wife passed away recently. He speaks of her with compassion and kindness

“She was a sick woman, I don’t really know what went on in her life before we met she would not even speak about her father.” Damien says that he is now on the road to recovery. He attends a therapist and says that without therapy and the support of ALANON and Amen he did not think he would have made it. He says “ I have a great therapist and it truly helps me to get through all this. We all need support and I’m lucky I have great colleagues and friends and my family. I regret not telling them all years ago, I only hope that other people in the same predicament can get the help I did”

When asked how he now feels about women, he replies with a big smile “Ah sure I love them ha ha. All the people at work are women and each and every one are wonderful people. Its taken a long time for my confidence to came back and I’m getting there. People have to understand its not a women’s problem or a mans its all of ours, male and female. I’ve met a lovely lady and have a good relationship. But I would not have been able to do this without help”

Damien likened his life to climbing Croagh Patrick when was asked his opinion on the therapy “ah yes, we have to talk about. There are many things that carry you away, children, work, friends, family but you have to look after yourself, you have to talk. I always think of when I climbed Croagh Patrick. Yes it’s a big steep climb, a mountain, but if you keep going its wonderful when you get there. Many times I have stumbled along the way but I have a great belief in the human spirit and my God”

## *Conclusion*

In conclusion the author has found that there has been a significant amount of research in the past into issues of family abuse and child abuse. Whilst researching there was lots of information on abuse of women and children and a lot less on the abuse of men. It is apparent that one of the biggest problems facing abused men today is the lack of understanding and acceptance from society itself that women are abusive as much as men.

There are arguments that women are only violent to their spouse or partner when they are defending themselves. It is of course possible that a woman will retaliate if she is being attacked. And the majority of the time men are bigger than their spouse. The greater average size of a man will mean that his punch will do more damage than a smaller woman. Gelles argues that it is categorically false to imply that there are the same number of “battered” men as battered women.

The research showed that there should be great concern about women’s violence toward men. Especially in the court system where a court can send children back to an abusive home due to false allegations made by men. There has to be work done to instil faith in our justice system for all victims of abuse.

The psychological effect, of not being believed, has on men is very damaging. There is a great need for training and information for professionals and people manning help lines. An understanding that domestic abuse is a gender problem not a male or female problem. The research shows that having someone to talk to and to share their problems with is a

vital support needed for the growth and the healing process for all victims.

It has highlighted the problem for men reporting and their fears around not being believed. This should be addressed at all levels, including the Garda, social workers and any individuals who might be approached with this problem.

Finally the findings show the need for this problem to be taken seriously. To look at the needs of male victims organisations when funding is being shared out. This is a serious problem and the risk of suicide for these men is very definitely high. Too high. Children can be taught instead of its wrong to hit a girl they should learn its wrong to hit anybody. Bullying, because that's what domestic abuse should be handled, in the playground and name calling taken seriously. Children should be shown the devastation this kind of behaviour can do to another human being be it male or female.

*“Remember some of these women are not deliberately vicious it could be that they are doing the best they can under their own painful circumstances. You don't have to go as far as liking them. From understanding can come empathy and compassion.*

*You too may feel deep pain - real pain. You may feel threatened, frustrated, angry, outraged even, but regardless of how “right” you believe you are we all need to learn one simple mantra, and decide to live by it. As impossible as this may seem,*

*“Do No Harm”*

*Mary Cleary*

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## ***Appendix A***

### ***List of questions To Damien***

Can you say a little about your self?

What was your own upbringing like?

Did you experience domestic abuse or violence in your home of origin?

When did the abuse start?

What was your fear around disclosing?

Why didn't you talk to your friends and family?

Why did you stay?

Did your wife have a drug or alcohol dependency problem?

Do you drink yourself?

How did you manage to carry on with all that pain?

How did you explain your wife's problems to your children without demonising her?

Did they understand?

What was the hardest experience for you?

What was it like being falsely accused of abusing your children?

How did you find help?

How do you feel about women for example in the work place?

What is hardest to cope with, physical or mental abuse?

How did being sexually humiliated effect you in your relationships with women?

How did you find psychotherapy?

Did it help?

Would you recommend it to others?

What is the biggest problem in your opinion facing male victims of domestic abuse?

What would you recommend for agencies?

## ***Appendix B***

### ***List of questions to John Moffett, Psychotherapist***

How long have you been involved with Amen?

Have you treated men and women who are victims of domestic violence?

What do you see is the biggest problems men have to face?

How high is the level of depression amongst male victims?

Do you feel that the family back ground plays a part in how the victims cope?

Have you found through your work that victims use alcohol and drugs to help them cope with their pain?

Do you find that men respond well to therapy or not?

What is the core problem for these men?

Do they stay in therapy?

Do you feel that domestic abuse is worse for women, or for men or do you see it as a gender problem?

Overall what steps do you think would help this situation?

## *Appendix C*

### *Questions for Mary Cleary, Founder of Amen.*

When did you start Amen?

What made you decide that an organisation like this was needed?

Where do you get funding?

Your schedule is very full, are you involved in training?

When did you realise there was a problem?

What is your greatest concern for these men?

You run a support group, is it successful and what do the men get from it?

Do you believe women can be as violent as men?

What is the hardest thing for these men to cope with from your experience?

What do people need to know?