

# **Fathers' experiences of domestic violence and their views on services for them and their children**

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A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements of the degree of MSc in Social Work in the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences.  
School for Policy Studies, September 2009

Word Count:11999

## 1

**Introduction**

This small scale study considers how fathers experience domestic violence and their views on services to support them and their children. The study is sensitive to the various definitions of 'domestic violence' adopted by British law, statutory and non-statutory service providers for victims of domestic violence. The term domestic violence will be used throughout the study because it reflects the wide range of behaviors involved beyond physical violence.

While research indicates that there are undoubtedly fewer male victims of domestic violence, there is increasing awareness of male victimization. The Home Office (2003: 52) has invited views on how it should respond to the "unmet needs" of male victims of domestic violence – a population it has identified through successive British Crime Surveys. The view of "unmet needs" of male victims seemed apparent at my placement, as student social worker, with Children and Young People Services. I worked with a separated father who was the victim of domestic violence who experienced difficulties maintaining contact with his children because of his abusive ex-partner.

There is, furthermore, compelling evidence for thinking that domestic violence is a context where child abuse is likely to take place. Whilst mothers' narratives of abuse have provided much needed insights into the consequences of domestic violence, father's accounts of female perpetrated abuse have been slower to emerge, generating much controversy and hostility. This study seeks to add to a small, but developing qualitative literature by exploring the congruence of fathers' accounts of intimate abuse and violence. This, it should be emphasized, in no way minimizes or exculpates the appalling incidence of violence against women, and it certainly does not seek to "de-gender" the problem of domestic violence (Berns, 2001). Therefore, the study intends to avoid supporting fathers' rights

groups and other conservative political movements that attempt to diminish the severity of male to female abuse.

The study upholds social work values and these are highlighted throughout the study with reference to both the British Association of Social Work (BASW, 2002) and General Social Care Council (GSCC, 2002) codes of ethics/practice. This investigation was carried out through a questionnaire survey involving twenty four fathers who has been the victims of domestic violence. The aims of this study are as follows

**Aim one;** to indentify how fathers' believe domestic violence has affected the family.

**Aim two;** what are fathers' experiences of agencies that support victims of domestic violence.

This study begins with a literature review (Chapter Two) which explores the definition of domestic violence, the evidence base, possible effects on children and agency responses. It also critically analyses the research discourse around domestic violence and the extent to which it is a gendered issue, thus providing a theoretical framework for this study. The methodology (Chapter Three) then outlines the research design and explores ethical considerations. Findings (Chapter Four) are then presented and a related discussion (Chapter Five) considers these results in relation to the literature review and social work values. Limitations of the study are further acknowledged and recommendations for the future are provided along with a final conclusion.



**2****Literature Review**

The literature review starts with a working definition of domestic violence and limitations of the terminology. Next, I consider the 'discovery' of domestic violence and the development of action and analyses and the focus on gendered violence. The review considers relevant research relating to domestic violence and considers the validity of these studies and the different theoretical and methodological perspectives on domestic violence. The review then discusses whether women are overwhelmingly the victims of men's violence and have their needs prioritized or whether domestic violence a gender-neutral issue, affecting both men and women as victims and offenders. The implications of the theoretical framework for domestic violence with regards to children will be considered. The literature review will make use of both national and international research.

**2.1 Background**

A variety of terms have been used to describe domestic violence including "family violence" and "domestic abuse". I have decided to use the term "domestic violence" as it is still the most commonly used (Hester et al 2000). It has, however, been argued (Hester et al 2000: 17-18) that there are a number of failings with the term. Firstly, the word "domestic" might appear to limit the context for the violence to those who live together. It is argued that violence from male partners often continues after women leave the abusive relationship (Walby and Allen 2004). Secondly, the word "violence" seems to suggest exclusively physical violence, whereas individuals who experience domestic violence may experience a range of different abuses from their partner which might not be physical (Hague and Malos 2005). Thirdly, the term "domestic violence" hides the issue of gender; research suggests that perpetrators are usually men and victims normally women (Mirrless-Black 1999; Walby and Allen 2004).

The current common definition of domestic violence used across government departments in England, and for the purposes of this paper is

‘Any incident or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or are family members, regardless of gender or sexual’ (Home Office 2006)

This definition recognizes the numerous behaviours involved in domestic violence and incorporates both same-sex and heterosexual relationships as well as the wider family. This definition, however, has been criticised for ignoring the coercive control elements that are an important factor of domestic violence (Hester et al 2000: 18). Also, researchers argue the definition should be extended to include non-familiar components of violence, such as threats to employment and victims perceiving the legal process as discriminatory (Brogden and Nijhar 2004).

Domestic violence is recognised because of the work of feminist scholars, researchers and activities. Feminism has played a central role in debunking myths that trivialized domestic violence (Chesney-Lind, 1997). Since the 1960’s, feminists have brought domestic violence to the public’s attention through “Domestic Violence Research” and have campaigned to ensure the effects are known. Their research has shown, in heterosexual relationships, the vast majority of cases the men are abusers and the women are victims (Mirlees-Black 1999; Walby and Allen 2004). Domestic violence is, therefore, usually defined as men’s violence towards women in intimate relationships (Hester et al 2000). Within this framework men are often conceptualized either as perpetrators or as complicit bystanders whose failure to effectively challenge the abuses perpetrated by other men sustains women’s victimization (Hearn, 1998).

Most knowledge of partner victimization of domestic violence prior to feminist led research drew upon literary and historical accounts. These accounts clearly emphasized the role of women as the predominant victims in household abuse and violence. There is, however, a history of male victims of domestic violence being caricatured as ‘hen-pecked husbands (Brogden and Niljhar, 2004; Stitt & Macklin, 1995). It is said that in the UK in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century a man who was unable to control his wife’s behavior, might be forced to wear women’s clothing and “a battered husband” was made to wear an outfit and ride backwards around the village on a donkey” (Steinmetz and Lucca 1988). Much of the data, however, is little more than anecdotal and reflects UK society’s dismissive attitude toward domestic violence (Brogden & Nijhar 2004: 12).

“Domestic Violence Research” has been criticized for failing to recognize male victimization (Brogden & Nilhar 2004: 13). It is argued that the emphasis on the patriarchal structure of interpersonal relationships inevitably excludes factors that may result in male victimization leading to “feminization of domestic violence” and implying an “invisibility of the male victims.” (Sarantakos 1999). This perspective has its origins in Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz (1980) in the USA who carried out research into domestic violence using an instrument called the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) and self-report questionnaires. More than a 100 studies using CTS have found that women self-report as much perpetration of physical aggression as men (Staruss 1999).

There are criticisms that CTS ignores the contexts, meanings, and motives of both men’s and women’s violence (DeKeseredy & Dragiewicz 2007). Domestic Violence Researchers argue that studies must examine violent “act”, violent “events” and the context and consequence in which domestic violence occur (Dobash and Dobash 2004). For instance, CTS ignores the reality that the threat to use physical violence may be more controlling than the physical act itself and for not distinguishing whether an act of violence is used to control or as means of self-defense (Nazroo 1995). Therefore, it is argued, women’s use of violence in

intimate relationships is not understood using CTS because it fails to examine the context of the replies and therefore provides an inaccurate depiction of domestic violence. Straus and Gelles have acknowledged the failing of CTS and changes have been made (Gelles and Loseke 1993). This has led research using CTS that indicates women's violence is normally less severe (Archer 2000; Nazroo 1995; Walby and Allen 2004).

## **2.2 Domestic violence research**

The term "domestic violence" can cover a wide range of experiences. The measures used in research can differ greatly as to the type of relationship they count as "domestic" and forms of experience that constitute "violence" (Mirrlees-Black 1999:1). The debate on the "correct" way to measure domestic violence (Nazroo, 1995) involves theoretical and methodological approaches to research (including concepts, definitions and measurement) that shape the nature of studies and the findings produced which, in turn, inform policies and practices (Dobash and Dobash 2004), this will be discussed in relation to quantitative and qualitative research of domestic violence.

### *2.2.1 Quantitative research*

Samples of the general population can provide some estimate of the extent of domestic violence. Surveys for the general incidence of domestic violence in Britain are provided by the British Crime Survey report (Povey 2008) and Scottish Crime Survey (MVA 2000) both are comprehensive statistical surveys. The British Crime survey reported (Povey 2008) that one in five men have experienced domestic violence since the age of 16, while, three in ten women have experienced domestic violence since the age of 16. The Scottish Crime Survey (MVA 2000) reported that one on five women and one in ten men had experienced either "threat" or "force" from their partners or exp-partners at some point in their lives. Some men's rights activists used these results to argue that there should be more funding for men's domestic violence services, such as



refuges (Gadd et al 2002: 4). However, the studies combine quite different subjective experiences of victimization under the same heading and it is argued that the broad sweep of the response categories cannot deal with the individual differences of experience. Further, these studies provide little in terms of the evidence of qualitative factors – particularly, the effects of such experiences. A further problem when researching the incidence of violence perpetrated against men is that it can be difficult to differentiate men who are perpetrating violence from male victims (Hearn, 1998; Hester 2009: 4). As a consequence, deciding how to acknowledge men's accounts of victimization is a problem for academics and practitioners (Featherstone & Trinder 1997).

### *2.5.2 Qualitative research*

Domestic violence research acknowledges the importance of qualitative research methods for a more accurate understanding of the meaning of domestic violence and the context in which it occurred (Hester et al 2000). Qualitative data can add richness to the research that quantitative data alone cannot provide. Towards this aim, studies in England and Wales (Mirlees-Black 1999; Walby and Allen 2004) and Scotland (Gadd et al 2002) were commissioned to explore the nature of the “abuse” men experience and the context in which it occurred. The Scottish Executive's own analysis of the data uncovered some sex differences amongst the population of “victims of domestic abuse”. Men relative to female victims of domestic abuse were less likely to have been repeatedly victimized or seriously injured. Only around one third of abused men said that they considered themselves to be “victims of domestic violence” compared to nearly four fifths of abused women (Gadd, et al 2002). Possible reasons for this difference is discussed further within the literature review.

The British Crime Surveys (BCS) are followed up with a limited domestic violence self-completion questionnaire. Amongst the findings, the BCS (Mirlees-Black 1999) concluded that the outcome of assault tended to be less serious for men than for women and that male victims are less likely to admit the true seriousness

of such assaults for reasons of shame. In terms of support, male victims were considerably less likely to report their experiences to the police. It was estimated with regards to domestic violence “women are the overwhelming majority of the most heavily abused group” (Walby and Allen 2004: vii).

## **2.3 Gender**

Research appears to indicate that women’s violence is not as severe or emotionally controlling as men’s. Johnson (2006) argues there are often qualitative differences in the types of violence perpetrated by men and women. A key feature of domestic violence often portrayed by men is their need to control their partner and assert privilege (Swan & Snow 2002). This has led researchers to move beyond detailing violent events and focus on ‘control’ behaviors to identify relationships involving domestic violence (including domination, hurt, humiliation, and isolation) (Stark 2007). It is argued (Dasgupta 1999) that culturally dictated norms greatly limit a woman’s ability to maintain absolute control over a male partner using these tactics. For instance, men have historically been the primary wage earners in families and have greater access to money. Research indicates that female perpetrators cannot deprive men of financial independence (Gadd 2002).

### *2.3.1 Women use of violence*

Research on women’s use of violence in relationships indicates that women do not tend to use systematic threats or the use of violence to exert power, induce fear or control over their male partners (Osthoff 2002). Studies also show that men typically do not feel fear, bewilderment and helplessness when attacked by a woman, as women often do when attacked by a man (Dobash & Dobash 2004). It is argued that the differences in fear between men and women are not surprising. In domestic violence situations, women are much more likely than men to be injured and injured severely (Archer 2000). A further finding that is consistent across studies of women who are perpetrators of violence against

male partners is that women are normally violent in the context of violence against them by their partners (Hague & Malos 2005 Swan & Snow, 2002 Johnson, 2006).

### 2.3.2 *Men's victimization*

Unlike women, there have been few qualitative studies of men's victimization commissioned to date (Hester et al 2000; Gadd 2002). Two qualitative studies completed outside of the UK include; Lewis and Sarantakos (2001) study of 48 Australian men, most respondents reported unreasonable and unprovoked verbal attacks, some men explained that the verbal abuse was centred around their children, for example, being told that their children were not their own. In another study, *Abused Men*, Philip W. Cook (1997) documents his analysis of thirty US male victims. Some of the men in Cook's sample claimed their partners had made false accusations of partner abuse and child sexual abuse against them in order to retain custody of their children.

There have been three major qualitative studies of men's victimization in the UK. In their study, *'Battered Husbands': The Hidden Victims of Domestic Violence*, Stitt and Macklin (1995) interviewed 20 men from Liverpool who claimed to be the victims of female abuse. Some respondents were still living with abusive partners, in some cases, in order to protect their children. In most cases, abuse also involved verbal, emotional, and psychological forms of cruelty. Most argued that fear of further violence together with emotional abuse, was worse than actual physical harm. Some female partners were said to have constantly threatened to contact the police or threatened to take away their children. When the police were called it was often the male victims, as opposed to female perpetrators, that were arrested. Consequently, Stitt and Macklin (1995:6) argue that many of the men ended up coping alone, experiencing isolation and an acceptance that they were "not a real man."

In their report, *Male Victims of Domestic Violence*, Brogden and Niljhar (2004) interviewed fifty men who said they had been the victims of domestic violence. Brogden and Niljhar present a similar picture of men's experiences of domestic violence to that of Stitt and Macklin. Most respondents regarded emotional abuse as more sustained and significant than physical violence. Sympathetic and helpful responses from statutory service providers were apparently a rarity.

Gadd et al (2002) revealed that those men who are victims often find the experience of abuse severely emotionally and physically harmful. They note (in relation to service provisions) that disbelief and lack of support services can compound male victims' experience of abuse. These qualitative studies seem to support the assertion that women have a higher risk of injury from domestic disputes than men. But also seem to reveal that those men who are victims often find the experience of abuse severely emotionally and physically harmful.

## **2.4 Agency responses**

Public policy is concerned mainly with women as victims of partner violence and men as perpetrators, an approach that is largely based on victim samples and analyses of crime statistics, as outlined above. Researchers support the general trend (Dobash & Dobash 2004; Hester 2009) of policies and interventions relating to domestic violence should be almost wholly designed to deal with the serious problem of men's violence directed at women.

Since the mid 1970s there has been increased recognition of domestic violence as a crime. The criminalization of domestic violence has had an impact on police interventions (Hester & Radford 2006), although the impact on arrests and prosecution has been limited (Hester and Westmarland 2005). Hester (2000: 111) argues that the criminal justice system has an important role to play in preventing and challenging domestic violence for women, both symbolically and practically. Yet research indicates disbelief and lack of service provision are

factors that can compound victims' experience of abuse for men and women (Gadd et al 2002). It is argued (Stitt & Macklin 1995; Brogden & Niljhar 2004) nearly all male victims are isolated individuals owing to the relative paucity of groups willing to acknowledge their victim status.

The difficulties that women face in reporting domestic violence and in seeking support are well documented (e.g. Dobash and Dobash 1979). Therefore, it has been reasonable to assume that men might also encounter reporting problems and difficulty seeking appropriate support. Researchers, however, have argued that it is wrong to assume that people's experiences of domestic violence are homogenous. For instance, Mama (1996) found that black women in particular are less likely to call the police because they believe the police will overreact. It is also argued (Gadd 2002; Hester & Westmarland 2005) that women are also more likely to seek help compared to men.

It is argued by some researchers that a large proportion of agencies that deal with domestic violence target only female victims. Consequently, some professionals, like counseling professionals, may be insensitive or even hostile to a man describing himself as a victim (Macchieto, 1992). There are only a few organisations in England and Wales (none in Scotland) providing help-line and information support for male victims in the UK; The ManKind Initiative, the Dyn Project (based in Wales), Male Advice Line (part of Respect Charity) and Broken Rainbow (LGBT charity). Other commentators (Cook, 1997; Stitt & Macklin, 1995) argue that men's victimisation is not taken seriously by the police, and that making malicious accusations against men is one aspect of abuse taken by female perpetrators. The Crime Survey shows that the vast majority of domestic abuse incidents are not reported to the police because men often unwilling to report domestic violent incidents (Gadd 2002). Some researchers, however, believe that men tend not to report partner abuse to the police because they considered the incident "too trivial or not worth reporting" (Povery 2009:67), a

possible example of men not being emotionally hurt by incidents of domestic violence.

A move to gender-neutral public policy in domestic violence, through the suggestion that men are victims presents an obvious challenge to research that argues domestic violence is mainly about men's violence to women. With this challenge come, in turn, challenges for policy, research and theory (Grady, 2002; Goodey, 2005). Further, since gender-neutrality rests on the assumption that domestic violence "...may happen to anyone..." (Home Office, 2002, p 2), the approach associated with it is to provide services to anyone – women or men. This approach starts from the understanding that it is important to include men and promotes male victims' rights to service provision and encourages broadened and increased access to, and equal opportunities in, such provision. Thus, a move to gender-neutrality challenges feminist analyses about male power and male violence but also challenges the women-focused service provision that is associated with these analyses.

## **2.5 Children and domestic violence**

The term, 'Domestic violence' has been criticized for masking the interrelationship between such abuse and abuse experienced by children (Hester et al 2000:41). Research (Hester 2009) indicates that children are present in over half of cases (55%) when domestic violence or abuse took place. In cases involving post-separation violence, issues related to child contact were mentioned as a feature in nearly a third of cases (30%). A wide variety of difficulties faced by children who witness domestic violence are very widely reported (Hester et al 2000). There is a wide range of literature documenting the overlap between domestic violence and child abuse (Kelly 1994; Mullender et al 2002).

It is argued (Hester 2007: 97) statutory responses still do not recognize the impact of domestic violence on mothers and their children. However, domestic violence and child welfare have become linked with emphasis on the violence men are capable of as partners and fathers towards women and children (Mullender et al 2002). A recent review of existing policies on domestic violence in England and Wales includes a comprehensive list of 'detailed recommendations on key policy areas', underlying the UK strategy is promoting the protection of women and children at risk of violence (Harwin 2000: 382). An amendment to the definition of harm in the Children Act 1989 now includes 'impairment suffered from seeing or hearing the ill treatment of another' (Adoption and Children Act, 2002). This reflects that children living with domestic violence are over-represented among those children referred to statutory children and families teams with concerns about child abuse and neglect, and represent up to two thirds of cases seen at child protection conferences (Hester et al 2007).

Most of the literature on children living with domestic violence has focused on the numerous ways in which domestic violence may undermine the relationship between child and mother (Humphreys et al 2006; Mullender et al 2002). The possibly damaged relationship between mother and child appears to be the consequence of "the tactics of abuse" (Humphreys et al 2006) inherent in domestic violence. It is argued "the tactics of abuse" appear to hamper some mothers and their children in repairing their relationships once they are in safety because of a 'conspiracy of silence', product of a situation 'dominated by secrecy, silence and fear' (Mullender et al., 2002: 175).

The following list of issues has been identified (Humphreys et al 2006) that can harm the mother-child relationship, this includes, but is no means exhaustive: mothers can be emotionally abused, by being called names, which belittles women in the eyes of their children (Mullender et al., 2002), who frequently see and hear much of what is going on (McGee, 2000). Secondly, children may be involved in the abuse in a range of other ways, including being subjected to threats that coerce their mother into conforming to the abuser's demands, having

their own needs and feelings blatantly disregarded in circumstances where the abuser's power and control hold sway (Kelly, 1994). Thirdly, children may themselves be subject to direct physical or sexual abuse by the same perpetrator who abuses their mother (Edleson, 1999). Fourthly, where children attempt to fight the man or to rescue their mothers from his violence, this reverses the normal adult-child roles. This can undermine the woman's role as protector of her child, particularly where the child's own safety is threatened (Christian et al., 1997). Finally, research indicates that contact presents a danger where there is a history of domestic violence (Hester & Radford 2006). Child abduction is one of the more extreme ways in which abusers may undermine the carer-child relationship. There is currently an average of 10 international child abductions reported each week in the UK (Kilsby, 2001).

There appears a lack of research into the issues faced by fathers and their children who are the victims of domestic violence. Most of the quantitative evidence on the co-occurrence of domestic violence and parenting is concerned with cases where a man is the perpetrator of domestic violence, although there is qualitative evidence of a less prevalent phenomenon that involves more complex patterns of intra-familial violence, including that towards men (Walby & Myhill 2001).

## **2.6 Summary**

Evidence strongly suggests that men are more violent than women in intimate relationships, and that women are not equally likely to be violent in this situation. The use and effects of violence differ both in extent and nature for males and females. Studies that do examine the nature of violence suggest that the majority of females surveyed—and relatively few (if any) males—with violent partners experience control, fear and intimidation on a daily basis. Moreover, the claim that men and women are equally violent in intimate relationships is placed in doubt by studies that have demonstrated men's monopoly on the use of violence in other social situations. However, it should be noted that qualitative



studies of male victimization reveal that those men who are victims can find the experience of abuse severely emotionally and physically harmful.

The study recognises that domestic violence is usually perpetrated by men against women and supports theoretical frameworks to account for this unilateral condition. The work of domestic violence research has opened the way for researchers to further investigate and understand domestic violence's impact upon the family, or as Stanko (2006: 554) comments "what is often missing from a general understanding of violence is asking what can be learned from the struggles feminists have waged for decades now against sexual and physical assault". It is argued the lack of research into father victimization has limited our understanding of violence and victimization against women and, in particular, violence against children. The evidence base has clear gaps with regards to how domestic violence affects fathers and the children. The study, therefore, will consider if fathers who have experienced domestic violence behave like victims. That is, the study will assess participants' level of fear, the extent to which domestic violence affects participants' relationship with the children, the extent to which participants' feel their time with the children is controlled by the violent partner, and participants' sense of disempowerment and helplessness.

Research seems to indicate that even when mothers are clearly the aggressors in relationships; men may or may not exhibit these types of classic victim responses. In most cases, women simply do not inspire fear in men or succeed in controlling their behaviour. Quite a bit of evidence suggests that mothers exhibit these kinds of victim responses; yet, little is known regarding fathers who are victims. So, I aim to consider as my first research question: how do father believe domestic violence has affected the family?

It appears from research that domestic violence agencies confront a population of male victims who have felt forced, threatened, or frightened by partners. This population coexists alongside a smaller number of men who have been

repeatedly abused by partners, and have lived in fear for themselves and their children. Whilst the importance of supporting victims of domestic violence has been noted, there is very little literature on the topic of services for fathers – at least fathers as victims rather than as perpetrators, the second research question I will consider is: what are fathers' experiences of agencies?

### **3 Methodology**

This study considers the experiences of fathers who have been the victims of domestic violence and their perception of agencies to support the family. Within this, I focused on two research questions:

- how do fathers believe domestic violence has affected the family life;
- what are fathers' experiences of agencies.

In order, to investigate the research questions, I used a qualitative framework consisting of an anonymous online questionnaire (see APPENDIX A) using a self-selected population of respondents; this appears to be the most effective approach for documenting evidence of the nature of male victimization and abuse in partner relationships. The research design, strengths and limitations are considered below, as well as discussion of validity and ethical concerns. The research design, strengths and limitations are considered below, along with a discussion of validity and ethical considerations.

#### **3.1 Research design**

As noted in the literature review, many of the contrasting results over the extent of gendered victimization in domestic violence are due to researchers using different forms of methodology. The discrepancy between the findings in domestic violence research does not necessary mean that one set of statistics is correct and the other not. Both may be correct (Gelles & Lockse 1993). However, they reflect the experiences of different groups of people and demonstrate different forms of domestic violence (Brogden & Niljhar 2004: 21).

Previous qualitative research has been limited in its consideration of fathers as the victims of domestic violence (Skinner et al 2005: 23). This study, therefore, is

positioned within current research discussions; the use of qualitative methods seeks to develop an understanding of the issues facing fathers who are the victims of domestic violence. In line with values involved in the practice of social work, I am committed to service user empowerment. It was important for my research design to find ways of including service users in the creation of knowledge; this is compatible with BASW codes of practice, where definitions of “Service to Humanity” in practice include the engagement of service users in research studies.

In order to answer the research questions whilst avoiding an overly prescriptive investigation, the questionnaire consisted of open and closed questions. Open-ended questions enhance questionnaire-respondent rapport, allowing respondents to qualify their responses, encourage interaction and collaboration between researcher and subject, and elicit versions of subjective experiences that reflect the lived experiences of victims (Brogden & Niljhar 2004: 17). This allows greater flexibility to explore the experiences of different respondents whilst the use of a fixed quantitative design ensured the aims of the research were investigated.

With regard to assessing need for provision of support services from both statutory and statutory agencies, I therefore decided that an ethnographic qualitative methodology was the most appropriate. The study sought to determine the severity, the frequency, and the consequences of domestic violence for fathers and their family, and, in order to determine the requirements of agency responses. This study adopts an ethnographic methodology advocated in violence against women research (Hester et al 2000; Skinner et al 2005), in using a self-selected population. As a result, like early studies of female survivors of domestic violence, it is mostly concerned with the consequences of domestic violence on the family, and does not address causation and frequency among the total population. Also, like former studies, the validity of this evidence depends on the honesty of participant’s responses.

### 3.2 Sample

This study does not contain a methodologically pure sampling frame. For pragmatic resource reasons, a two month period was determined in which fathers could respond to the questionnaire; their experiences of domestic violence, the consequences on their family, how they responded to it, and the support required. Research (Brogden & Niljhar 2004) indicates that it is difficult find male victims willing to discuss domestic violence. Therefore, in attempting to generate a sample, various approaches were taken to ensure adequate participation: I arranged meetings / contact with both voluntary and statutory agencies that have access to men in this situation. However, only voluntary agencies supported the research; information about the study was shared at conferences, organization databases, and organizational newsletters.

Organizations that agreed to help were Mankind, Fatherhood Institute, Dyn project and the Salvation Army. Mankind and Fatherhood Institute agreed to circulate an advertisement linked to an online-survey with accompanying information (see Appendix A). Whilst project staff at the Dyn Project and the Salvation Army asked service users if they wished to participate by completing the on-line survey. Information about consent is included at the beginning of the questionnaire and is stated clearly that the questionnaire is completely anonymous.

Participants could respond via an on-line questionnaire, this had the advantage of being widely dispersed over a large geographical area allowing it to reach many potential participants. There were twenty respondents and, though a relatively small sample size, it appears a good response from a difficult to reach group, over a several week period.

Fathers who experience domestic violence are a hidden population and may feel isolated and embarrassed due to a lack of social support. To lessen distress, participants remain completely anonymous and no personal details are asked. Therefore, knowledge about the diversity of respondents, such as age, ethnicities are unknown. The study accepts the limitations of the study due to the self-selected respondents. The study therefore does not attempt to measure the extent of male victimization. It is concerned with the qualitative aspects of domestic violence rather than the quantitative aspect. The nature of this qualitative study means it is a one sided account, like much of the first generation of abuse studies, it does not provide for the allegedly abusing partners story.

### **3.3 Questionnaire**

The questionnaire, due to its anonymous nature, allowed participants to discuss their experiences of domestic violence openly. It is argued, (Robson 2002) in the absence of an interviewer, respondents are more likely to discuss issues of a personal nature. The questions, that form the majority of the questionnaire, were designed to help achieve the goals of the research and, in particular, to answer the research questions. The questionnaire was also designed to gain the cooperation of respondents, and elicit accurate information. This was achieved by comparing the questionnaire with previous studies of gender violence.

The questionnaire was piloted to two social work students. The importance of piloting data collection methods has been stated (Oppenheim 1992:48). It was suggested that the presentation of the questionnaire could be improved. The quality of presentation of a self-completed questionnaire is important when achieving a good rapport with respondents (Robson 2002:265).

The beginning of the questionnaire indicated the aims of the survey and assured confidentiality. The language of the questions was designed to be both understandable and unambiguous to respondents. The questionnaire was

designed to be easy-to-follow; it was short in length and questions were kept simple. The questionnaire contained a mixture of open and closed questions. It is suggested that open questions (Robson 2002: 263) are avoided in self-completed questionnaire due to the long time it take to analysis responses, however, due to the predicted small response rate I felt confident in being able to analyze answers within the time limits of the study. A brief note at the end thanked participants for their responses and provided details of voluntary organizations that provide support for male victims of domestic violence.

### **3.4 Data analysis**

I considered the wording of the questions and how they would elicit data before administrating the questionnaire online. This involved how the questionnaire would be presented and structured. I ensured that the research aims informed the questionnaire. Robson (2002: 259) suggests that data should be collected through the production of coding. I decided against using a word processing package to analyze the data. The expected small amount of responses to the questionnaire meant data analysis could be accomplished manually. This meant highlighting the key themes that emerged from each of the questions. I used a quasi-statistical approach which relies largely on the conversion of qualitative data into a quantitative format where I compared and contrasted the respondent's answers to each of the questions. Apparent, open ended answers were provided with a set of pre-categorized responses. The main purpose was to simplify individual responses by classifying them in a smaller number of groups, each including responses that were similar in content. Unfortunately this can result in the loss of information.

The nature of the on-line questionnaire means that I cannot be sure whether a genuine father has responded to the questionnaire. It is argued that a questionnaire administered over the internet has increased likelihood of fraudulent responses because of the propensity of some Web users to assume

multiple identities (Silverman 2004), in particular, the controversial nature of male victimization means respondents could be providing misinformation.

### **3.5 Validity**

Whilst recognizing that domestic violence disproportionately affects women, the specific aim of this study was to focus on fathers' who had been victims and their perception of domestic violence and its affect on the family. Quantitative research is often considered as being non-contentious because it provides fully codified data. Qualitative research data appears more subjective - an art more than a science due to the discourse data it produces (Robson, 2002: 476). However, Marshall and Rossman (1999: 193) argued that a study cannot help but be valid if the parameters of the research are clearly defined and the description of findings is embedded in the data collected.

The qualitative data is useful in supplementing and illustrating the quantitative data from the questionnaire. I used small amounts of qualitative data as an adjunct within the quantitative fixed design. This helps the participant's accounts to live through vivid quotation and apt example (Robson: 2021: 456).

### **3.6 Ethics issues**

As Langford (2000) illustrates, the ethical issues involved in researching domestic violence can be particularly acute. My paramount ethical concerns were about confidentiality, protection of the informants' anonymity, and minimization of distress during the research process, that is, adherence to an "ethic of care" (Plummer, 2001). Prior to commencing data collection, ethical approval was gained from the School for Policy Studies at the University of Bristol (see APPENDIX B). Due to the sensitive nature of the study maintaining confidentiality was vital. The anonymity of respondents was secured by the questionnaire not asking for specific demographics of the participants such as



ethnicity, age, etc (Esterberg, 2002: 50). I am grateful for the courage and openness of the participants and for their willingness to discuss sensitive, personal issues. Indeed, as Owen (2006) reminds us, resisting violence by discussing it is an act of bravery. Langford's (2000) argues that participants report advantages in this kind of research, including catharsis, being given a voice, and a gaining a sense of purpose.

To avoid possible deception, misunderstanding, or misrepresentation, I developed a participant information sheet (APPENDIX A) which explained as much as possible about the study. It explained that the findings would be shared with agencies that work with male victims of domestic violence. Social Work's commitment towards anti-oppressive practice implies a responsibility to engage with service users' beliefs, perceptions and opinions about their own situation and the services they receive (Beresford & Croft 2001: 302). The knowledge contained within the experiences of male victimization can be invaluable in designing and delivering services that genuinely meet people's expressed needs and support them to preserve and express meaning about what has traditionally been seen as a meaningless and dehumanising experience (Foucault 1967).

## 4

## Findings

## 4.1 Description of sample

This was an on-line anonymous questionnaire. It consisted of eight questions. There were twenty four participant responses to the questionnaire. The qualitative data was collected, analysed and displayed thematically according to research aims. Due to the anonymous nature of the questionnaire the race, age and economic class, etc of the participants was not known. The questionnaire, however, stipulated that I was seeking fathers who had experienced domestic violence.

## 4.2 Analysis – Aim One

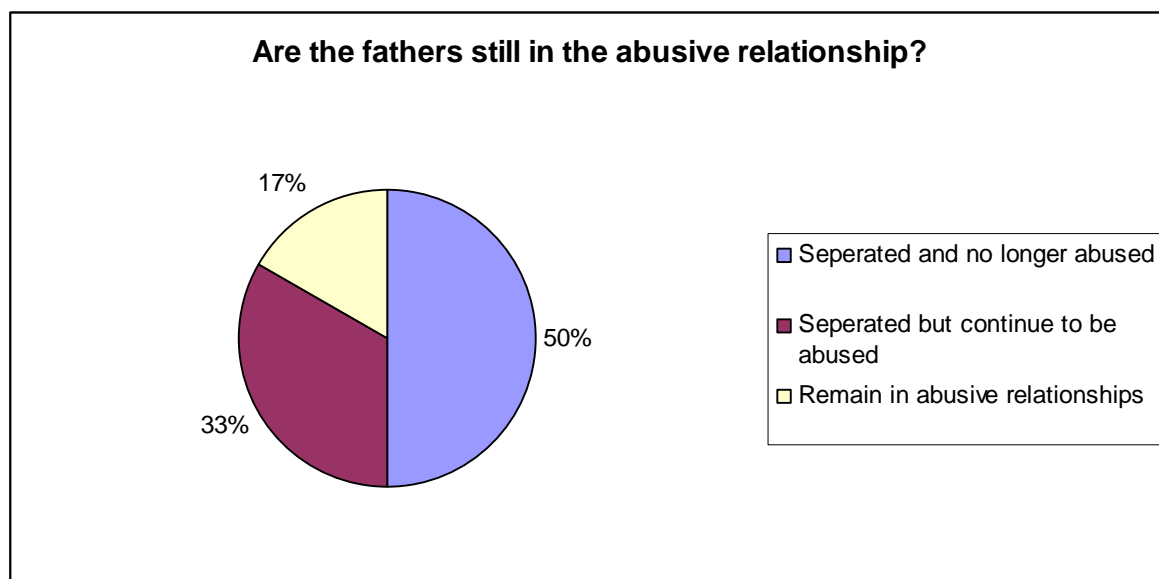
**Question 1.1**

**How do fathers believe domestic violence has affected the family?**

## 4.2.1 Are fathers still in the abusive relationship?

*“The relationship has ended but the abuse continues unchanged”*

Figure1:



Twelve of the participants (50%) have separated and are no longer in their abusive relationship. But eight other participants who have also separated continue to be abused (33%). Four of the participants remain in their abusive relationship (17%). This is presented as figure 1.

The questionnaire did not ask participants to describe the abuse they experienced, thereby attempting to avoid causing further pain. Fourteen respondents, however, chose to describe the domestic abuse they experienced, suggesting it was an important issue they wanted heard. The most frequent form of abuse identified by participants was (ex) partner's control of the children: *"Yes, although she has left the family home she uses restriction of access to my daughter (10) and financials to abuse me"*

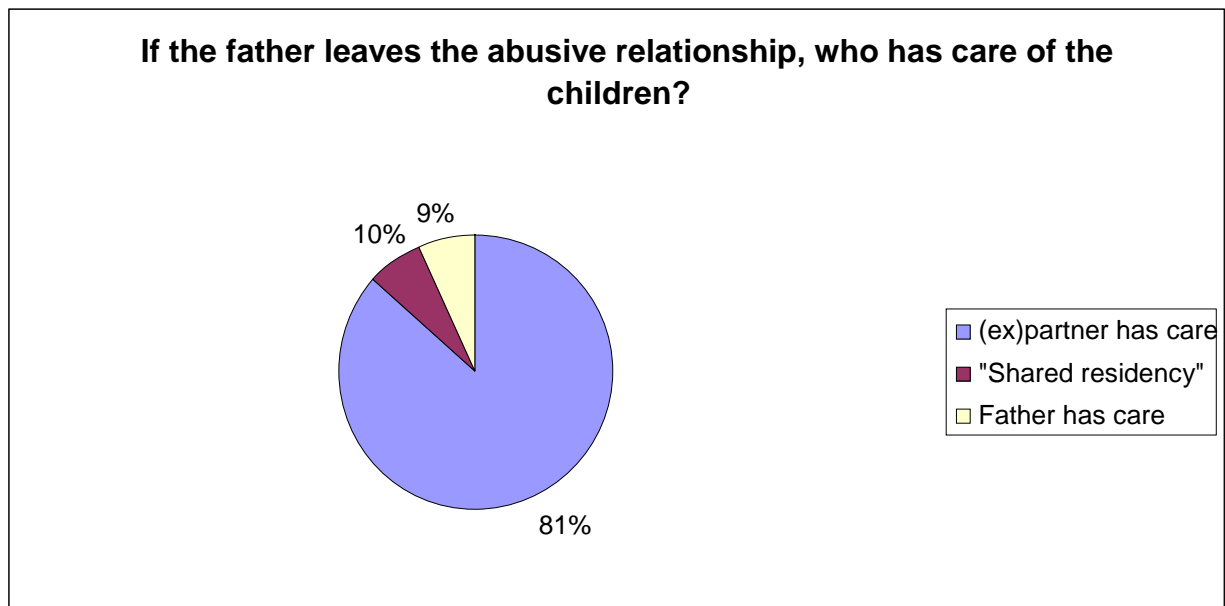
The second most identified abuse was physical - ten respondents stated they had been physically abused. Examples of physical abuse described by fathers, include; being pushed down stairs, attacked with a baseball bat, and being kicked and punched. Other forms of abuse experienced by participants include verbal, financial, mental and sexual abuse. Usually participants experienced multiple forms of abuse:

*"I have managed to escape it at the cost of losing my daughter. Mother left the family home and took my daughter. I do not know where they live, and fighting through the courts to see her. Ex has continued to harass me and break into my home including trying to run me over. Police are not interested and treat it as a divorce issue"*

#### **4.2.2 Who has care of the children?**

*“The wife currently has care of the children, she moved out and took the kids with her on the 27 of March 2009, and she was physically abusive for the last 4 years, and mental, emotional and financial for the last 11 years. Although I only realized this 14 months ago”*

Figure 2:



Predominantly the mothers have care of the children. Seventeen of the participants answered that the mother has sole care of the children. Two participants stated that they had sole care of the children. Four of the fathers continue to live with their abusive partner and therefore still have shared care of their children. Finally, two participants have “shared residency” with the mother for care of the children, see figure 2.

#### 4.2.3 Do the fathers have contact with the children?

*“None unless I am living with her as she wont let me have contact with my daughter”*

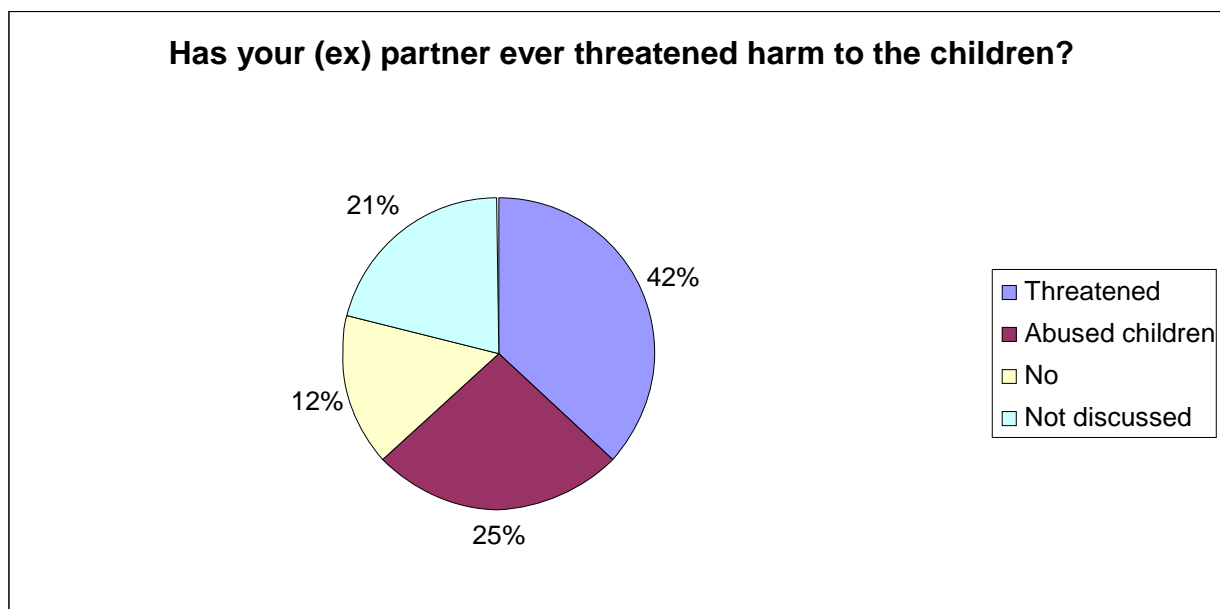
The responses from the questionnaire indicated that; five of the fathers had no contact with their children at all. Of the remaining participants, fourteen fathers had a varied amount of contact time with their children. Nine of these fathers stated that contact with their children is determined by their abusive partner: *“My time with my child is minimized and controlled by my ex and is roughly every 2 weeks”*

Two fathers lives solely with his son and therefore has constant contact with his child. Three fathers continue to live with their partner and children.

#### 4.2.4 Has your partner threatened harm to the children?

*“My wife was very violent to both me and our daughter. My daughter regularly witnessed the violence of her mother against me and I saw the violence her mother perpetrated on her. I often used to take a beating to try and protect my daughter”*

Figure 3:



Of the twenty four respondents, eleven replied that their partner had threatened to harm the children. But another seven did carry out the threat in various forms, this included physical, emotional and verbal abuse of the children. These attacks were often a combination of all three. There was one participant who suspected his partner sexually abused the child. Four participants stated that their partner never threatened harm to the children. The remaining five did not make any reference about their partner threatening harm to their children, see figure 3.

#### **4.2.5 Have the children witnessed domestic violence?**

*“My daughter from the age of 3 witnessed her violence towards me and at the age of 5 stood up to her mom to defend me whilst I was lying on the floor”*

Of the twenty four participants, eighteen answered that their children had witnessed domestic violence in one form or another. This was broken down to fourteen witnessing physical violence of various degrees, one participant explained how his daughter tried to protect him from the physical violence of his partner. Four participants stated that their children had heard them being verbally abused.

#### **4.2.6 Have the fathers spoken to the children about domestic Violence?**

*“No my daughter is 10 and it is not a suitable subject for her to hear about and she needs to be protected. I have talked around the subject in child friendly way to explain conflict”*

Almost half of the participants chose not to answer this question. Seven participants stated that they had not spoken to their children about domestic

violence. The remaining six participants said they had talked to their children about the domestic violence.







### 4.3 Analysis – Aim two

#### Question 1.2 what are the father's experiences of agencies?

#### 4.3.1 Do fathers contact agencies for support?

The majority of fathers did contact agencies for support. Eighteen of the participants stated that they sought advice from various organizations that they thought could help victims of domestic violence. Four participants stated that they choose not to contact any agencies for help. Figure 4

Figure 4: agencies contacted for support

	Percentage	Responses
Victim Support		12.5 7
Police		21.4 12
Police Domestic Violence Unit		10.7 6
Social Services		25.0 14
Voluntary organisations		16.1 9
Other		14.3 8

#### 4.3.2 Agencies sought for help by fathers

Overwhelmingly participants contacted more than one agency for help. More than half of the respondents contacted three or more agencies. See figure four

Eight respondents also provided details of other agencies they contacted. Two participants stated they contacted: their local G.P, the participants contacted Citizen Advice Bureau, the child's school and Member of Parliament.

#### **4.3.3 How were fathers' treated by agencies?**

*They didn't acknowledge I was a victim and didn't provide any useful help.  
I won't contact them again.*

Overall, the eighteen participants who sought help from agencies were overwhelmingly critical in their responses. Most frequently, participants commented that they felt ignored by the agencies involved: *"They ignored my complaint and said that they only help women who are victims of violence"*

Fathers also felt that agencies did not acknowledge them as victims and were likely to perceive them as the perpetrators: *"They treat you like the criminal"*

Participants also explained that when allegations of domestic violence were made by both partners, agencies treated the female's allegations far more seriously than the males: *"Social service, Police and Domestic Violence Unit took my ex's false allegations of me abusing her as fact"*

Amongst the eighteen negative experiences there were a few positive comments. Four of the positive comments were regarding the voluntary sector, one father specified the Mankind Initiative for praise and one participant singled out the Police Domestic Violence Unit for their positive approach. The final two positive comments concerned individuals, a Police Officer and a person at Victim Support, but overall these participants remained critical of the agencies:



*“With the exception of one lady at Victim Support and one female Police Constable they were absolutely appalling. I made formal complaints against Police Officers and Social Services and took legal action against them in the High Court”*

### Social Services

*“Social Services totally uninterested”*

Social Service was the most frequently contacted agency by the participants, but they were also the most ardently criticized, all of the responses stated that they were not interested and of no help. Some felt that social services believed the abusive partners version of events over theirs because of their gender. The only positive comment of social services was that they did listen but took no action:

*“Social services were caring and understanding and did nothing”*

### Police

*“Not interested in any violence against me”*

Police were criticized in ten responses. A common theme was that the police do not acknowledge men as victims of domestic violence. Six participants stated that they felt the police believed the abuser's version of events over theirs, which they felt meant they were portrayed as the perpetrator:

*“Police...took my ex's false allegations of me abusing her as fact. She abused me to until I was crying in the back garden and then called the police saying I have been domestically violent and abusive to her. When this could not be further from the truth*

It was also felt that the police viewed domestic violence as a private matter rather than a criminal issue: *“Police are not interested and treat it as a divorce issue”*

#### Police domestic violence unit

*“DV unit said there was nothing they could do...”*

Five respondents discussed their experiences of Police Domestic Violent Unit (PDVU) with four of them being critical.

A criticism of PDVU was that they took the abuser’s allegations as fact. Another criticism was their inability or unwillingness to help. One father, however, stated that they were helpful and treated him with respect: *“Police DV unit treated me with respect and were very very clear and helpful.”*

#### Victim Support

*“Victim Support only supports women”*

Of the four participants who described their experiences of Victim Support all were negative. The respondents all stated that they received no support and two respondents believed the agency was unwilling to acknowledge male victims of domestic violence.

#### Voluntary organizations

*“Mankind Initiative, and FNF [Families need Fathers] provided group support”*

The five respondents who discussed their experience of voluntary organizations were largely positive describing how the agencies listened to the problems they

faced as victims of domestic violence. Mankind Initiative was identified in two answers as an agency that provided support. One participant, however, stated that despite their support they lacked resources to help.

### Other

Some of the other agencies approached included GP, school, CAFCASS and solicitors. One of the participants even felt that his local GP was biased in favor of his partner and would not speak to him about his own daughter. Two of the participants who went through the courts felt CAFCASS did not help. Whilst one participant believed that solicitors and court staff were biased in favor of the abusive woman. Finally, one participant criticized his children's school for being "terrible."

#### **4.3.4 Would fathers' contact agencies again?**

*"Would I contact them again – what is the point?"*

Fourteen of the fathers stated that they would not be contacting agencies for support in the future, Seven of which explained that the agencies did not treat them as victims of domestic violence and one even felt he was treated as a criminal, and in the end, agencies did nothing to help.

#### **4.3.5 What support, if any, did the agencies provide?**

*"None!"*

Most participants felt that they received no support from agencies. Ten participants used the word "none" to describe the support they received.

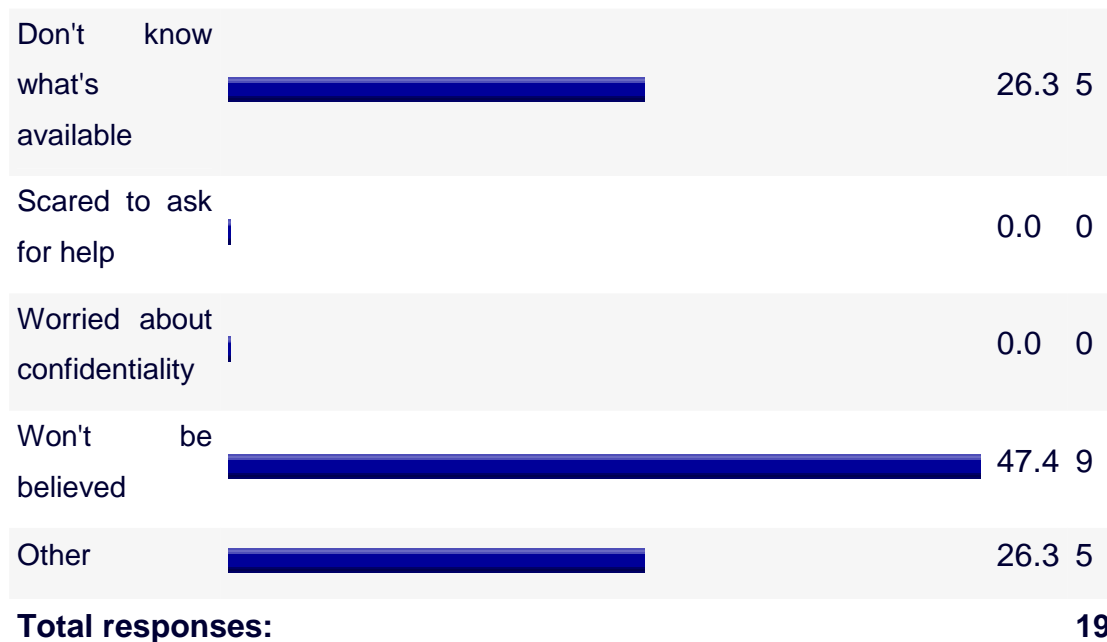
Six fathers identified support the police provided; this consisted of encouragement to prosecute, a perpetrator being kept in the cells overnight, perpetrator being given an official warning, and a crime number being provided. Five respondents stated agencies provided support by listening too them and providing advice. In two of these cases, it was the voluntary sector that provided the support:

*“Mankind Initiative, and FNF [Families need Fathers]... let me understand I was not alone and that it was wrong of her and I can stand up for myself”*

One participant stated that his GP offered counseling service and treatment for stress. One participant was given the details of male victim domestic violence organization by the citizen advice bureau.

#### 4.3.6 What prevented fathers from contacting agencies?

Figure 5:



Just under half of the participants stated that they did not contact agencies because they thought they would not be believed. Followed by the reply that they did not know what is available. The remaining responses were for individual personal reasons. See figure 5.

#### **4.3.7 What type of support have fathers wanted but not received?**

This question got an overwhelming response of comments. The most common support identified by participants was for agencies to listen to their requests for help: *“Somebody to talk to”*

Fathers believed, however, they were treated unfairly by agencies because of their gender. Nine respondents felt that agencies did not recognize men as victims of domestic violence. In four cases, participants said they were treated as the perpetrator not the victims of domestic violence: *“Father friendly people, who do not automatically assume that if there is violence it must be the male.”*

Finally fathers believe the criminal justice system must take stronger measures to prosecute abusive females. Participants believe that the criminal justice system does not recognize women as perpetrators of domestic violence:

*“For my ex to be prevented from abusing my daughters through PA, and exposing them to hostility, for my ex to be cautioned and told to stop verbally and mentally abusing me, to take my reports seriously and actually report them. For the police to take both sides of the story and actually complete a DV assessment for the man, woman and children separately.”*

A secondary factor, fathers wanted agencies to provide was more support for them and their children: *“Understanding of my situation, protection of my*

*daughters re parental alienation and exposure to domestic abuse from her and being brought into the divorce as a weapon.”*

Nine participants were concerned that their children had not received adequate support for the damage caused by having a domestically abusive parent. Another Six participants addressed a need for agencies for agencies to support male victim’s access to their children. One individual recognized the need for more sheltered accommodation for fathers and their children to escape domestically abusive relationships.

**5****Discussion**

Before the findings are discussed it is important to recognise the limitations of the study.

**5.1 Limitations of the research**

The extent to which qualitative data can be transferred to broader populations is restricted (Robson, 2002:467). This problem is furthered by the limited size and range of the study's sample. In addition, I choose not to gather demographic information about the sample due to confidentiality issues, as discussed in Chapter Three. Authors of self-selected population studies of women have acknowledged similar limitations, "These women were not randomly selected and they cannot be considered a legitimate data base from which to make specific generalisations." (Walker 1979: xiii)

A further failing of the study, women's violence is not analysed from their own perspective. It is argued that women's violent behaviour can only be understood when placed in the context of their male partners' violence against them (Dobash & Dobash 2004; Swan & Snow 2002: 310). Research using couples generally shows that men and women often disagree about the occurrence of violence in relationships (Dobash *et al.* 1998). Despite being practically and ethically difficult, there is a need for further research such as Hester's (2009) which explores in depth both victims' and perpetrators perspectives on the same incidents in order to develop awareness of the dynamics of the abusive relationships.

**5.2 Discussion of significant findings – Aim one****Question 1**

**How do fathers believe domestic violence has affected the family?**

Analyses of the Crime Surveys' 2000 (MVA 2000; Povey 2009) suggested that male victims tend to find leaving an abusive situation especially difficult and were more likely than female victims to be still cohabiting with perpetrators of abuse. However, the majority of participants in the study had separated. This suggests that fathers, unlike mothers, are less restricted in ending abusive relationships (Hester et al 2007). However, as in previous research (Cook 1997; Stitt & Macklin 1995) participant's main concern about ending an abusive was the safety of their children. Fathers expressed the belief that it was their responsibility to provide for their children, and in many cases they believed they acted as protector or buffer between their partner and children as targets of physical aggression that otherwise have been directed to their children. Many of the participants also believed that no matter what their partner did to them, the judicial system would be against them. Thus, not only would they fail to gain custody of their children, if they left the marital relationship, visitation also would be blocked, by their spouses as a continuation of controlling and abusive behavior, with husbands having little or no recourse under the law.

The findings of this study, in line with previous reports (Gadd 2002; Walby and Allen 2004) - the nature of male victims' experiences and their accounts of reporting incidents to agencies, relatively to female victims - suggests that male victims are less likely to have been victims of numerous assaults, or have been seriously injured (Archer 2000). Physical abuse uncovered in the research does not appear to be as severe as that reported in studies of female victims, although this small study was not in a position to elaborate robust findings on this issue. Consistent with the findings of the British Crime Survey (Mirrlees-Black, 1998; Walby and Allen 2004), the questionnaire uncovered that being pushed and shoved was the most common form of force used against participants.

Looking for evidence of physical violence, however, only provides part of the domestic violence picture. Few participants regard the physical attacks the worst



aspect of the domestic violence. The key determinants of domestic violence are a perpetrators' use of abuse as a means of exerting power and control over their victim (Johnson 2006). Male victims vary in terms of what they consider "abuse". Some men adopted definitions which focussed narrowly on the use of physical force, however, most defined abuse in terms of emotional abuse, in particular restricted access to their children resulting in fear and intimidation. Apparently, similar to women victims (Stark 2006), respondents regard emotional abuse as more damaging and painful than physical violence, resulting in the loss of self-confidence and self-esteem, demoralization and depression (Brogden & Niljhar 2000: 42). The apparent psychological harm described by participants appears to contradict research (Dobash & Dobas 2004) that subscribes to the view that abused men often do not suffer psychologically as victims of domestic violence.

This study, like previous qualitative research of male victimization, indicates that males experience a range of abuses from their partners. It is impossible to do justice to the wide ranging experiences of male victims in the discussion. Nonetheless, the qualitative research suggests that domestic violence against fathers have lasting effect. This abuse can involve emotional, financial, and physical forms. Gadd (2002) found the relevance of financial hardship on male victims as non-significant due to men usually being the main wage earner. However, this study suggests that fathers believe financial disadvantage falls predominantly on them as a consequence of domestic violence. The qualitative effect of non-physical forms of violence on men should not be underestimated.

This study suggests that the experiences of fathers may have similarities to the experiences of mothers who are victims of domestic violence; this is a consequence of factors connected to victimization, in particular, partners denying fathers' access to the children (Walkby and Myhill 2001). Child abduction is one of the more extreme ways in which abusers may undermine the father-child relationship (Kilsby, 2001). More commonly, perpetrators abuse child contact

arrangements, making fathers' and children feel unsafe and unable to develop a new life together, free from fear and threats (Hester and Radford 2006).

The limited qualitative research on father's experiences of domestic violence suggests that there are some differences in the nature and context of the abuses experienced by men and fathers, as well as between male and female victims generally, although there are also many similarities. The study indicates that women use control of the children as way to "control" fathers' behavior (Stark 2007). Research had indicated that women do not tend to engage in coercive controlling tactics to exert power (Osthoff 2002). However, women's threats over children appear to participants as a tactic that produces fear and helplessness in fathers, this study suggests, bears some similarities to when women domestically violent men attempt to control women (Dobash & Dobas 2004). Participant's accounts, therefore, seem to confirm recognition that domestic violence is often derived from complex factors of family relations other than gender (Brogden & Nijhar 2004)

Research indicates that the relationship between the non-abusing parent and the children is frequently undermined by domestic abuse (Humphreys et al 2006). According to participants, the children's experiences of domestic violence seem to bear similarities when the father or the mother is the abuser. A violent person may act in that way not just to a partner but also to other members of the social unit. Participants' responses confirm that female partners are reported to threaten to harm the children (Brogden & Nijhar 2000: 42). Many of the women who were prepared to use physical violence against the man were also physically abusive towards their children (Edleson 1999). Children could become direct victims as an alternative to the partner. Children may attempt to intervene in the conflict (Christian et al 1997). Several of the women who were abusive with their partner, reportedly acted similarly towards their children. Children were involved in the abuse in a range of other ways, including being subjected to threats that coerce their father into conforming to the abuser's demands. Emotional abuse

appeared to have been the most severe form of abuse, according to respondents it was often conducted with an audience of the joint children of the household (McGee 2000). All of these aspects of domestic violence cited by participants and have been found to undermine the carer–child relationship (Kelly,1994; Hester and Radford 2006), however, research appears to have focused solely on mother-child victims.

This study indicates that fathers may engage in a kind of “conspiracy of silence”, that bears some similarities to mother and child victims. Fathers often do not talk to their children because they are trying to protect them from the full knowledge of what happened, ‘Legacies of secrecy and of protecting one another from painful knowledge may be hard patterns to break’ (Mullender et al., 2002: 175). This silence on an issue of primary family importance, which deeply affects the lives of both fathers and children, can continue to undermine the already vulnerable relationship between them, even when they are free of the abuse. Recognizing father/child relationships is in line with best social work practice and the BASW code of ethics strongly promotes human dignity and worth (BASW, 2002).

There appear few settings in which communication between can be opened up between father and child. Participants Father’s state that they do not have care of the children and there is a lack of services to support their relationship with the children. Building on the knowledge that many children recover once they are safe from violence (Mullender et al 2002), this study suggests that the process can be assisted by work that addresses the relationship issues between fathers and children in positive ways. The study highlights the fact that it is important to see the strengths in the relationship between fathers and children and to facilitate the work that may need to be done to assist their recovery together. The father–child work advocated is an approach used in research (Humphreys et al 2006) for mother-child work that could be adopted to help children and fathers overcome the adverse effects of living with abuse and move on towards a safer and happier future.

Opportunities can be forged to work with fathers and their children together to re-establish or develop communication channels undermined by years of abuse. To make judgments about a father's parenting capacity without providing opportunities and resources to support the relationship between fathers and children may perpetuate the effects of abuse. By not having services available to fathers because of their gender is against both GSCC (2002) and BASW (2002) codes of conduct which explicitly state that social workers should work to uphold public trust and confidence in social care services through honesty and reliability. For social workers interested in developing aspects of anti-oppressive practice, this and other studies agree that this creative work is both possible and necessary (Humphreys et al 2006).

## **5.2 Discussion of significant findings – Aim two**

### **Question 2**

**What are the father's experiences of agencies that support victims of domestic violence?**

Unlike previous reports (Mirlees-Black 1998; Gadd 2002), there is no indication that male victims of domestic violence are less likely to call the police than women. Participants often contacted the police but found no support and were often perceived as the perpetrator of domestic violence. The finding supports commentators (Cook 1997; Stitt and Macklin 1995) argument that men's victimization is not taken seriously by the police and that making malicious accusations against men is one aspect of the abuse some female partners perpetrate. Furthermore, participants' accounts confirm reports (Gadd 2002) that those who perpetrate domestic violence against men are less likely to have their acts deemed criminal by the police than those who perpetrated domestic violence against women. It is however; impossible to tell the extent to which

police action was a product of the severity of the incidents, perpetrators' responses to the police and the victims' wishes.

According to this study, the reality as experienced by male victims of domestic violence is that professionals tend to be generally unhelpful. This finding emerged from the British Crime Survey which discovered that male victims were "particularly unhappy about the level of support offered by agencies, especially by the police" (Mirlees-Black 1998:63). In explanation, support agencies have a particular problem in recognizing that male victims can be just as in need of support and advice as female victims. Other researchers and commentators have found that professional people who come into contact with male victims of domestic violence either refuse to believe them or are ill-prepared to offer advice (Adams 1999; Macchietto, 1992; Stitt & Macklin 1995).

It appears from this study that father's, and as a consequence the children's experiences of victimization are being systematically misrecognised by social services. Strategies for denying or minimizing domestic violence are still evident in current social work with children and families (Hester et al 2007). This study produced evidence that the dominant pattern of minimization and avoidance can be singled out as a key problem that social work must overcome if practice is to become more effective in this area. This is not a new finding, but one consistently replicated in other studies (Humphreys et al 2006), thus suggesting an issue which is long overdue for attention. This needs to be seen in the context that a large range of social services tend to "filter out" men and fathers. The British Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics underlines the anti-oppressive role social workers must play in facilitating participation

Participants' concerns for their children support widespread agreement among researchers that children are adversely affected by conflict between their parents and this adversity increases with the severity and frequency of the conflict (Hester et al 2007). These considerations serve to further broaden our

understanding of domestic violence and the scope of interventions required to address it. For practitioners, competence and integrity (BASW, 2002) and the recording of essential appropriate information are needed in order to carry out an effect assessment and fulfill requirements of best practice. In particular, the study highlights the need for professionals to be aware that child abuse may itself be an indicator of domestic violence and vice versa.

The issues of child contact where domestic violence has occurred are some of the most contentious for practitioners. The development of safe child contact is a problem yet to be effectively addressed (Hester et al 2007). These considerations suggest that raising awareness of the true scope and reality of domestic violence would be an important part of any strategy in addressing domestic violence. It is well recognized that one of the ways of addressing the problem of domestic violence against women is to raise public awareness that the problem exists (Brogden & Niljhar 2004). However, The UK Government has never run an information/marketing campaign to support male victims. And the UK Government's domestic abuse policy comes under the remit of "Violence against Women"- it has no policy for 'Violence against Men'

The study confirms previous research (Stitt and Macklin 1995), in that respondents felt they badly needed somebody sympathetic to talk to, and that a help-line would go some way to help, but they also need professionals that will listen without already deciding the outcome. Minimization and denial of father victimization appears to permeate agency responses to domestic violence. Fathers are given the message that they risk much by complaining.

## **5.4 Recommendations**

### *5.4.1 Future research recommendations*

There are two future recommendations. Firstly, studies of domestic violence produce different results depending on the way the research is conducted (Dobash & Dobash 2004). For domestic violence research to be relevant it must

take into account the social and cultural background and the diversity of people's experience. Future research should record not only the extent of domestic violence but the social, political and economic background of participants, especially because men often have more power than women in intimate relationships. When domestic violence research doesn't consider such factors, the differences between men's and women's experiences of violence are ignored. Therefore, future research should seek to understand the complexities of domestic violence; this will require a multi-method approach that combines research into the extent of violence whilst looking at its background, nature and other characteristics.

Secondly, children's voices remain absent from this and many other studies of domestic violence. The perspectives researchers offer are often irrelevant to the children who experience it (DeKeseredy & MacLeod, 1997). After all, who knows more about abuse than the children who experience it? Children do not always or only want to talk to a parent (Humphreys et al 2006). Almost all the 54 children interviewed in the Mullender et al. (2000) study reported that it would be useful to talk to someone else they could trust, on their own terms. This included family, friends and neighbors, and sometimes teachers, counselors or social workers. Children want to be listened to, to be taken seriously, to be told what is going on and to be involved in decisions (Mullender et al., 2000). Currently, professionals across the inter-agency range come across to children as lacking sensitivity; children often do not feel they are noticed, believed or offered support in their own right (Mullender et al. 2000). This area could be researched further in line with social work values which promote active participation of service users and value service user knowledge as expert (BASW, 2002).

#### *5.4.2 National and local policy recommendations*

The Home Office (2003: 52) has invited views on how it should respond to the 'unmet needs' of male victims of domestic violence – a population it has identified through successive British Crime Surveys. On the basis of this research, it is

warned against a response dictated by prevalence statistics elicited from crime surveys and/or the assumption of comparability between male and female victims.

The major problem facing the male victims of domestic violence is that public awareness and professional perceptions are often very heavily influenced by the existing consensus on this issue; this can exacerbate the problems of male victims because it effectively denies the reality of their experience and contributes to the mutually reinforcing process that men do not present for services while services, in turn, do not develop to respond to men's needs. Government and other state agencies such as local authorities, the police and the NHS must publicly recognize that there are male victims of domestic violence.

If agencies wish to address the 'unmet needs' of this diverse population, the government must equip practitioners with a framework that enables them to work with men whose status as 'victims' cannot be easily assessed and sometimes only become apparent in the course of intervening. Models of intervention that provide men with similar service provision to that currently available to women, or otherwise distribute resources on the basis of general sex differences in victimisation rates are unlikely to live up to this challenge.

Disbelief and lack of service provision are both factors that can compound male victim's experience of domestic violence. It is suggested that the following should be priorities for the agency responses to father victimization; more training about the issues of domestic violence; more publicity to encourage male victims to report to agencies; extending partnerships with those agencies that are better equipped to support male victims.

## **5.5 Conclusion**



The study agrees that priority should continue to be given to policies that seek to effectively intervene to end violence against women in intimate relationships. Yet, violence of any kind, carried out by males or females, is clearly unacceptable. Answers to questions about whether or not men and women are equally violent or suffer equally in heterosexual relationships will depend on the focus of the research, the definitions of violence applied, and the types of research used. In this qualitative study, the two research questions combine to provide an analysis of how fathers report being the victims of domestic violence and living in fear of their abusive partners, often, because the mothers are the main carer of the children. The findings suggest that professionals need to understand the family dynamic at work in these cases– as seen from the perspective of all family members – before interventions are made, whilst recognizing that gender is a powerful and complex process that impacts enormously on the phenomenon of domestic violence, often resulting in violence against women.

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**Fathers' who have experienced domestic violence and their views on services to support them and their**



## **Fathers' who have experienced domestic violence and their views on services to support them and their children**

THE QUESTIONNAIRE IS COMPLETELY ANONYMOUS: YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS ARE NOT REQUIRED WHEN ANSWERING THE QUESTIONNAIRE

**Home Office research states that one in five men will be victims of domestic violence and two men every three weeks are killed by their partner.**

By kindly sharing your experiences you will assist research to demonstrate what support is needed to support fathers. I will share the findings of my research with Children and Young Peoples Services and voluntary organizations to demonstrate that father's experiences of domestic violence is real and deserves support.

To take part in the research you can either complete the questionnaire or simply write an account of your experiences of support that you received or support that you are looking for. You can either email to:

Cs7257@bristol.ac.uk

or post your answers to:

Professor Gill Hague

8 Priory Road

Bristol

BS8 1TZ

Replies can be sent until 31st July.

By sharing information with me you will be consenting to share your experiences with university tutors who assess the work and also with outside moderators

**Some of these questions are about sensitive subjects. Please answer only if you are able to share.**

Can you please say if you are still in the abusive relationship? If you are no longer in the relationship whom has care of the children?

If you no longer have care of the children; how often do you have contact with them?

Has your (ex)partner ever threatened to hurt the children? Have your children witnessed domestic violence? Have you spoken to your children about domestic violence?

Have you ever approached any of the following agencies for advice/he/p?

-Victim Support \_\_\_\_\_

-Police\_\_\_\_\_

-Police Domestic Violence Unit\_\_\_\_\_

-Social Services\_\_\_\_\_

-Voluntary organisations\_\_\_\_\_

-Other (please state who)\_\_\_\_\_

If you contacted any of these agencies, how did they treat you and your experience of domestic violence? Would you contact them again?

What support, if any, were these agencies able to provide.

What type of support have you wanted but not received.

If you have not contacted agencies; what has prevented you?

-Don't know what's available\_\_\_\_

-Scared to ask for help\_\_\_\_

-Worried about confidentiality\_\_\_\_

-Won't be believed\_\_\_\_

-Other (please state)\_\_\_\_

Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions.

**If you're a man experiencing domestic violence or you want to call on behalf of a male friend or relative, you can contact the Mankind Initiative & Enquiry Line on 0808 8010327 or visit their website at [www.mankind.org.uk](http://www.mankind.org.uk)**