

DISPATCHES: 'BATTERED MEN' SURVEY (1998)

SUMMARY OF DR KEVIN BROWNE'S ANALYSIS OF RESULTS (verbatim quotes)

See detailed survey results in separate document.

1. General response

This was a very interesting survey and it is the most comprehensive I have seen in this area for the UK. Generally, the results confirm our knowledge of the area, with some surprising findings.

2. Severity of violence

The sorts of injuries sustained confirm the work of Smith et al in Leicester Royal Infirmary Accident & Emergency Department, which showed that 12% of their domestic non-accidental injury cases were men assaulted by women, with the same level of severity as the vast majority of cases who were women assaulted by men.

3. Consequences of violence for the men

Only half the men sought any form of help and two thirds did not confide in anyone for over a year, while they were suffering violence. Not surprisingly this has led to a number of problems: half having problems forming new relationships with others, a quarter with sexual problems and over a half with depression, one in four of whom would go on to attempt suicide. This is related to the fact that not only were these men losing the women they once loved, but often their children as well. Three quarters of the men had problems seeing their children after separation with only one half contesting custody and a quarter being awarded it.

4. Violent women

The ethnic group of the women and men were as expected, with a slight under representation of ethnic minorities, due to under reporting in these social groups. The age range also held no surprises and the marital status reflected marital breakdown common in violent families.

As the research indicates, no social class is immune from violence in the family and the myth that it is about large women bullying small men is dispelled by your statistics, where nine out of ten male victims are taller and stronger than their partners.

Interestingly, the research shows that one third of the victims were attacked while they were asleep in bed, which is very different to wife abuse. However, the kinds of mental abuse suffered are the same for all victims, male or female, involving social and emotional isolation. Nevertheless, there does seem an increase in the use of the children as an object of threat especially in relation to custody disputes.

5. Escalating Violence

It is claimed that 78% of the women taunted their men to be violent back. The violence suffered by the men was as serious as wife abuse, one third being hit with heavy objects, a quarter being kicked in the genitals, two thirds threatened with a weapon, a half attacked with sharp objects and a fifth being stabbed

6. Police response

The police response was not surprising, in terms of them not taking the matter seriously [95% of the cases], as they come across so few reports of husband abuse [1% of cases], in comparison to wife abuse [71% of cases] and child abuse [11% of cases].

7. Arrested victims

What was surprising was that on a report of husband abuse it was more likely that the husband would be arrested, ie. the victim, rather than the female assailant. This would indicate that the violence was interactive and the male partner was getting the blame, regardless of the consequences. In fact, a quarter were arrested and were more likely to end up in court than in true wife abuse cases.

8. Background of the victims

The male victims' background showed a similar pattern with one third of the men having witnessed their parents being violent. Interestingly, one third of the men recall interactive physical violence in their parents, although I am sure if they thought about verbal violence and hostile acts this figure would be higher. Just over a quarter of the men also reported suffering abuse themselves as a child. This again is not surprising, as it is common for both offenders and victims.

Overall, only one quarter of the men commonly walked away, leaving three quarters of them behaving as above.

9. Mental health of offenders

Again it is consistent with family violence in general, that one in five of the offenders has a diagnosed mental health problem and is under medication. What is interesting is the predominance of depression in

these women as depression is usually associated with neglect. It may be that the depression and neglect of relationships are the cause of the arguments that led to the violence in these women. The notion of premenstrual tension is overstated. Aggression is a multi-factoral phenomenon and therefore only those women who are predisposed to exhibit violence are more likely to be violent at this time of the month. The remaining four out of five women can certainly be described as being emotionally disturbed, by the fact that they are violent to their partners.

10 Alcohol & drug abuse in the offenders

I found the rate of 31% low in comparison to previous research which shows that alcohol is associated in at least half of all heterosexual spouse abuse cases and at least three quarters of homosexual and lesbian spouse abuse cases. This might mean that the women are drinking secretly unknown to their partners.

11. Background of offenders

Two thirds [29% out of 43% of known cases] of the violent women witnessed their parents being violent. I would expect where they recall their father being violent to their mother, this may trigger a violent response to their male partners, when and if they threaten hostile acts [mental cruelty] verbal or physical violence to them.

Where they recall witnessing their mother being violent to their father, they may have modelled their behaviour on this and seen the aggression as an appropriate method to resolve conflict with a partner.

One half of the women had been abused themselves [20% out of 43% of known cases]. It is well established that the consequences of being abused as a child leads to the use of violent tactics both as a child and as an adult.

12. Previous relationships

One in six of the violent females had been a victim in previous relationships. This would have a similar effect as witnessing or being a victim as a child at the hands of your parents. Thus, any hostile acts or verbal aggression shown by their partner may trigger physical aggression in them as they are perceiving themselves in need of self-defence and get in first [the notion of attack as the best form of defence]. A third have a history of violence in previous relationships as an offender and the majority of both partners have already witnessed family breakdown, itself a cause of current stress in a relationship [comparing the current to previous relationships].

13. Links between child abuse and spouse abuse

The figure of 53% of men claiming that their female partners were also violent to their children is not surprising and is in line with previous research including my own. Approximately half of all violent partners also abuse their children, a third of the time it is the father and one third of the time it is the mother and a third of the time it is both, as indicated in the research, both past and present.

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Kevin Browne has been researching family violence and child abuse for 20 years and has published extensively on the subject. Recent publications include: *Preventing Family Violence* (Wiley, 1996). Professor Browne is a Consultant to the Home Office on family violence, and Chair of the Research Committee of the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (IPSCAN).