



## Dr Michael Flood seminar – He hits, she hits: Assessing debates regarding men’s and women’s experiences of domestic violence

In June, Dr Michael Flood presented a seminar on the increasingly prominent debates over men’s and women’s experiences of domestic violence. There is no doubt that both women and men can be victims of violence by a partner or ex-partner, and that both can be perpetrators. At the same time, Dr Flood emphasised that there is no ‘gender symmetry’ in domestic violence. There are important differences between men’s and women’s typical patterns of victimisation and perpetration.

The term ‘domestic violence’ long has been understood to refer to a *systematic pattern of power and control exerted by one person against another, involving a variety of physical and non-physical tactics of abuse and coercion, in the context of a current or former intimate relationship.*

Much of the existing data on domestic violence, however, focuses only on counting violent acts. Claims that men are half or one-quarter of domestic violence victims only are possible if we draw on studies which focus on ‘counting the blows’.

The Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS), a popular tool for measuring domestic violence, is widely criticised for not gathering information about the intensity, context, consequences or meaning of violent behaviours. It typically neglects issues of injury and fear, omits sexual violence, ignores the history or context for the violence, relies on reports by either husbands or wives despite evidence of lack of agreement between them, and draws on samples shaped by high rates of refusal particularly among individuals either practising or suffering severe and controlling forms of violence.

Dr Flood highlighted a series of contrasts in women’s and men’s patterns of victimisation and perpetration. Among adult victims of intimate partner violence, women are more likely than men to be subjected to frequent, prolonged, and extreme violence. Women are far more likely than men to be sexually assaulted by an intimate partner or ex-partner and to sustain injuries, to fear for their lives, and to experience other negative consequences such as psychological harms. In short, women are far more likely than men to live with what Johnson calls ‘intimate terrorism’ or ‘coercive controlling violence’.

There are also contrasts in the intentions, motivations, and nature of men’s and women’s uses of domestic violence. Women’s physical violence towards intimate male partners is more likely than men’s to be in self-defense, i.e. in the context of his violence to her. Male perpetrators are more likely than female perpetrators to identify instrumental reasons for their aggression, with their violence directed towards particular goals. Male perpetrators are more likely, and more able, to use nonphysical tactics to maintain control over their partners. At the same time, women are not immune from using violence to gain or maintain power in relationships.

Men are less likely to report their own perpetration of violence, especially severe violence, than women are to report theirs. Most past findings point to a tendency for men to under-report. Both male and female victims under-report their own victimisation. There is mixed evidence regarding whether male victims of domestic violence are more or less likely than female victims to report their experience. In some studies, there is evidence that men were less likely than women to report their experiences of partner violence because they did not find them serious or threatening.

Dr Michael Flood critiqued the claims about domestic violence made by anti-feminist men’s and fathers’ groups, including in Men’s Health Australia’s *One in Three* campaign. He noted that there is a slippage in this campaign’s materials between all forms of violence in families directed at males and violence against men by their adult *female partners*. *One in Three* neglects violence against males in families by other males, tries to degender highly gendered patterns of violence and of the factors associated with violence, and tries to undermine campaigns against men’s violence against women.

Dr Flood concluded that it is simply a falsehood to claim that large numbers of men in Australia are suffering abuse at the hands of their wives and female partners. If we think of domestic violence in terms of a pattern of power and control, it’s likely that women are 90-95 percent of victims. We do have to revise downwards our claims regarding the numbers of women living with intimate terrorism. But there is no change to the fundamental point that coercive controlling violence is perpetrated largely by men and against women. If we do not pay attention to the realities of women’s *and* men’s experiences of domestic and family violence, we will fail female and male victims alike.

A copy of Dr Michael Flood’s presentation and a link to the recording will be available later in July at [www.noviolence.com.au](http://www.noviolence.com.au)

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