

2. Men and domestic violence

2.1 What do men tell us about their experiences of domestic violence?

These are examples of experiences described by men calling the Men's Advice Line. This section describes things experienced by heterosexual and by gay or bisexual men. There are also some additional experiences which are specific to gay and bisexual men which are listed later in this section.

These experiences are examples of what victims tell us – but do not in and of themselves define being a victim. Some of these may be experienced from a partner who was using self-defence or as an act of violent resistance. Others may come about for other reasons.

In the following chapter we provide tools to help identify who is doing what to whom in a relationship.

Coercion, intimidation & threats

- Being threatened with violence by a perpetrator, if they don't do what the perpetrator wants them to do or if they do things the perpetrator doesn't want them to do
- Being threatened by the perpetrator that they will call the police or children's services and allege that the man is a perpetrator
- Being threatened with other legal proceedings
- Being denied access to medical care/medicine(s) etc
- Being put in fear by looks, actions, gestures
- Having personal items, family heirlooms, computer etc smashed or broken
- Being told that nobody will believe him because he is a man
- Being threatened with knives and other objects as weapons
- Being told if he tries to leave he will never see the children again
- Being denied sleep or being attacked whilst he is asleep

Emotional abuse

- Being put down and made to feel bad about himself
- Being called names
- Having mind-games played on him
- Being humiliated
- Being made to feel guilty and to blame for abuse
- Experiencing 'the silent treatment', being ignored
- Being told he is crazy, mad
- Being told that he is not the father of their child(ren)

Sexual abuse

- Being coerced or threatened overtly into sex

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- Being coerced into using objects
- Being coerced or pressured into sexual acts that he does not want
- Being coerced or pressured into having unsafe sex
- Having his sexual behaviour ridiculed in front of others
- Feeling he has to participate in sex out of fear he will be 'punished' for refusing because he doesn't feel safe
- Being made to participate in sexual activities with others against his will

Physical abuse

- Being hit, punched, kicked
- Male victims of female perpetrators also particularly talk about blows to groin area or scratches to face
- Being hit with objects
- Being attacked with a knife

Using gender

- Being forced or coerced into specific responsibilities and activities based on strict traditional gender roles without any negotiation and under fear of consequences of not complying
- Being told he is not a real man if he does not do certain things or in a certain way

Using isolation

- Being controlled about what he does, who he sees, what he reads, who he talks to
- Having social life, friends, hobbies restricted or stopped
- Being constantly accused of having affairs and ending up afraid to go out or talk to anyone out of fear of the consequences

Using children

- Receiving messages through the children
- Being excluded from activities with children
- Being belittled for attempts to look after the children

Minimising, denial and blame

- Being told that the abuse didn't happen or wasn't that bad
- Having injuries not taken seriously
- Being told he was responsible for abuse, that he deserved or caused it

2.2 Male victims and diversity

Gender: gender is a significant risk factor for domestic violence in various ways. The most obvious is that most researchers (though not all) have concluded from the available evidence that the majority of victims are female and the majority of perpetrators male. However, this also means that men in relationships with men are at increased risk. It also means that because male victims are in a minority, they are often invisible or overlooked by agencies or friends and family when they are victimised, or their experiences are trivialised.

Disability: disability is a risk factor for domestic violence. Disabled people can be in some cases very vulnerable to abuse, unable to seek help independently and highly dependent on their carer, who, if they are also their abuser, will have additional power and ability to control them. On the other hand, someone who is being abused by a disabled person may find it difficult to be believed.

Age: young people in general are in the highest risk age group for domestic violence. There is also some emerging evidence that older men may be at increased risk. In some cases this will be because of increased vulnerability and exacerbated by dependency on carers. In others there is the suggestion that men who have used abuse against a partner in the past are in turn abused by their victim if he becomes more vulnerable and she feels stronger than him.

Ethnicity: Men from specific cultural or linguistic groups may be abused in specific ways, or face specific obstacles to seeking help. Different cultural groups have different ways of describing gender based expectations, which will mean different justifications for abuse.

So-called 'honour'-based violence: Some men are abused by family members other than their intimate partner, such as in-laws or others who are forcing them to marry someone against their will or for reasons of family so-called 'honour'. These are often Asian men, but they may also be from other ethnic or religious groups.

Immigration status: men with uncertain immigration status or whose right to remain in the UK depends on remaining married can face difficulties in seeking help. They may have had passports removed or been told that no-one will help them. They may be additionally isolated due to lack of friends, family and language skills.

Sexuality: some aspects of these experiences are the same regardless of gender and sexuality of victim or perpetrator. However, some are specific. Domestic violence affecting men who have sex with men, trans-gendered people, gay and bisexual men will have specific aspects and can often be overlooked by many agencies.

Men in same sex relationships may experience:

- Being threatened with being 'outed' to family, friends or work colleagues

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- Being forced to stay in the closet / not be out
- Being told that violence is a normal part of same-sex relationships
- Being told that other abusive behaviour is a normal part of same-sex relationships
- Being controlled through fear of having HIV/AIDS status revealed to others

There are various specialist resources such as leaflets for use with men in same-sex relationships, which can be downloaded for free or obtained at low cost in print. Details are in the resources section of this tool kit.

2.3 Categories of clients who may approach services for male victims

In common with many specialist services, helplines, refuges and outreach projects offering help to male victims of domestic violence will regularly be approached by people who aren't the category of client the service is funded to help. However, this isn't just a simple matter of spotting them and referring them elsewhere.

There are many male victims of domestic violence and they deserve and have a right to our help and protection. **It is vital, in the interests of these men, that we ensure that we are prioritising our time to helping them.**

However, you will often find that perpetrators of domestic violence perceive themselves to be the victims. This is a very common strategy (unconscious or conscious) for perpetrators to use and one which they may use very effectively if we don't have ways of identifying who is doing what to whom and with what consequences.

There are longer assessment tools in Chapter 4 - Assessing. Practitioners have asked us why it is important to identify who is doing what to whom. Some have been concerned that this means they shouldn't believe what a client is telling them. In fact, we find that what the client tells us usually helps us to identify which category of client they are in – they might present as a victim, but listening to what they say about their experiences helps us to work out that they are in fact a perpetrator.

This is something we do to make sure we are doing everything we can to protect victims, male and female, and not unwittingly helping perpetrators, male or female. It's also something we do because many people aren't sure if they are victims or not and some aren't – they are unhappy in their relationship perhaps but not being abused or abusing. We also assess because we have to make the most of our finite resources and prioritise those in need of our specialist services over those who may actually need something else. In summary, **we don't assess clients because we don't believe them, we assess them because we want to meet their needs appropriately, because we want to increase safety and decrease risk.**

There are no definitive categories into which everyone can fit – there will always be some exceptions. The experience of the Men's Advice Line, the Respect Phoneline for perpetrators and other services working with perpetrators, guided by rigorous, relevant research on prevalence and frequency of domestic violence, indicates that the following categories of clients are the most common:

1. Victim/survivor of domestic abuse
2. Perpetrator of domestic abuse
3. Victim who has used violent resistance against the perpetrator
4. Perpetrator whose victim has used violent resistance
5. Mutual violence
6. Unhappy relationship with no abuse or violence

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Respect matrix of use and experience of intimate partner violence

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We have used our experience on the helplines, our work with perpetrators and male victims on the ground and current research lessons to develop a way of structuring our identification process. The diagram below helps to illustrate this.

	IN coercive control OVER partner/ex, because of own use of violence, abuse, controlling behaviour, threats etc - causing fear, control, injury in partner ↓	Living UNDER coercive control FROM partner/ex, experiencing fear, control, injury, anxiety about partner's reactions etc ↓
<i>Uses or has used physical or non-physical violence or aggression against partner/ex</i> →	Perpetrator of intimate partner violence	Victim who has used some form of violent resistance
<i>Experienced or experiencing physical or non-physical violence or aggression from partner/ex</i> →	Perpetrator whose victim has used some form of violent resistance	Victim of intimate partner violence

Notes on the Respect matrix:

- Someone who is USING violence/abuse and as a result of this is in coercive control OVER their partner is a **perpetrator**.
- Someone who is EXPERIENCING violence/abuse and as a result is living in coercive control UNDER their partner is a **victim**.
- However, if someone is USING violence and abuse or has used it, they could also be a victim, but a **victim who has used violent resistance**. Violent resistance may be self-defence or it could be an action out of frustration or desperation in response to abuse – it is usually dangerous for the victim to do this and could result in them ending up being

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arrested or even charged. However, for domestic violence practitioners it is important to be aware of the difference – the victim is the one living under coercive control (with specific indicators listed in sections below) and the perpetrator is not controlled by the victim's use of any violence. This is not to defend or justify their use of violence – it may be criminal and it is usually risky – but to understand it so that you can work more effectively with this category of client.

- Similarly, if someone is EXPERIENCING violence or abusive behaviour from their partner but they are the one who is able to exert coercive control OVER their partner, through their own use of violence and controlling behaviour, they then are a **perpetrator whose victim has used violent resistance**. Again, this is not to excuse or justify the victim's use of violence but to help you to work effectively and appropriately with the client.

How can clients be wrongly identified?

Clients are sometimes referred to domestic violence services as 'both victims and perpetrators' when they are actually a perpetrator and a victim who has used violence. Some clients refer themselves as victims but don't seem to be experiencing abuse or coercive control, just unhappy. Some are not clear at all. Based on our experience with male victims and with perpetrators we have identified four key ways that someone may have been wrongly identified or self identified by the time they present at a male victims service.

1. **Someone in a relationship which is unhappy but not abusive**

We are often contacted by people who appear to be very unhappy but not in an abusive relationship. About one in ten of the callers to the Men's Advice Line who initially present as victims of domestic violence appear to be, from what they say, not in an abusive relationship at all. Instead they appear to be angry or upset or sad about a relationship, or at relationship breakdown and wanting to find someone to blame. When asked about the relationship and any violence or abuse, they either identify no abuse or identify behaviours which may be unreasonable or frustrating but are not abusive. When asked about fear or control, they appear not to be experiencing any of either. We also have calls and emails which appear to have a similar sense of entitlement to their partners' services as perpetrators do – however, instead of responding with violence or abuse when their needs aren't met, some of them respond with feelings of being abused by the lack of services. For example, some men have complained about their partners' choice of food, cooking, or clothes and identified this as being victimised.

2. **Someone in a relationship where both are using or have used violence**

When referred to or presenting at a service, men and women are sometimes described or describe themselves as both being violent. Professionals and the clients may well infer from this that they are both **equally** violent or with equal

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consequences for risk. This often takes place when one or both clients are also experiencing compounding problems such as substance misuse or mental ill-health.

The situation is often complex. Victims may well be using legal reasonable force but nevertheless present a higher risk of injuring their abusive partner than vice versa. Perpetrators may be escalating their own use of violence, which could be leading to an increased risk that the victim will retaliate.

When a client is presenting or being described in referral as being in a mutually violent relationship, this indicates the need for more detailed assessment, using if possible a range of sources of information from the client, their partner or other agency working with their partner, other agencies and professional judgement if the worker is skilled and experienced at specialist work responding to intimate partner violence.

3. Perpetrator who is actually a victim

Sometimes, if the victim has used violence in resistance, self-defence, retaliation or to defend children or others they may be wrongly identified – or wrongly present – as a perpetrator. This mis-identification can be further exacerbated if the person concerned does not want to identify themselves as a victim

4. Victim who is actually a perpetrator

Sometimes, if the person using intimate partner violence has experienced force used by their victim as self-defence, defence of children, resistance or retaliation they may be wrongly identified – or wrongly present – as a victim. In these cases they may have used this incident or incidents to distract attention away from their own abusive behaviour, or other agencies may have identified them as 'both as bad as each other'.

Examples of each category of client as they may present to a service for male victims

In this section there are descriptions of each category together with an example of a relationship which is likely to be in that category, described as they are likely to present or be referred to a service for male victims. Each case study is accompanied by suggestions about the vulnerabilities and risk, questions to ask and suggestions for responses.

1. Victim/survivor

Someone who is or has recently been experiencing violence, abuse, fear, force, threats and coercive control from an intimate partner or ex-partner. They may need legal or practical protection, emotional help and support, advocacy and other forms of help.

Example: Daf and Megan

Daf is 73 years old and has been married to his wife Megan (aged 60) for 27 years. Last night she attacked him with a glass and he ended up in hospital. He says Megan has always had a fierce temper and that this has been getting worse for the past few years. Until recently the abuse was mostly verbal but there have been several incidents recently where he has been punched and kicked. Now he is worried that this will be the start of an increase in violence. He doesn't want the police involved as he doesn't want to get her in trouble or to end the relationship. He wants some advice.

2. Perpetrator

By definition this is someone who is or has recently been using violence, abuse, fear, force, threats and coercive control to an intimate partner or ex-partner. They are likely to be suitable for domestic violence intervention programmes for perpetrators. They are likely to have committed criminal acts and may need criminal or civil legal sanctions to enforce changes in behaviour. However, when presenting to a service for male victims, they are likely to use some language of victimisation, rather than being explicit about being a perpetrator wanting help to change. The example below is a common one.

Example: Terry

Terry describes himself as 'unfairly arrested' by the police when he pushed his girlfriend away from him during an argument. He says that she is verbally abusive to him and that she is always winding him up to see how far she can push him. He says that he has only pushed her away 'once or twice' and that he doesn't understand why the police have arrested him. He wants to know how he can get legal help as he feels he is the victim in the situation.

3. Victim who has used violent resistance

A victim, as defined above in (1), who has used or is using violence. This includes violence used for defending themselves or their children or property, or as a way of preventing a likely attack on them or their children. This is likely to be legal 'reasonable force'. It also includes violence used as a means of resistance against, or expressing frustration with, the patterns of coercive control and fear being used against them. When presenting to a service for male victims they may have been identified as a perpetrator, or they may be more concerned about their own use of violence than their partner's, or they may be clear that they are the victim but want help not to use violence. Even if the violence they are using appears to be reasonable, it is not safe and is likely to increase the risk to both adults and to any children. They may need legal and other help and also consideration of how their own use of violence may be or become illegal or unsafe. They will also need safety planning which incorporates an understanding of their own use of violence and strategies for reducing this.

Example: Aftab and Judy

Aftab says he left hospital this morning after being stabbed in the chest by his partner; he says he was lucky it wasn't too deep but could have been a lot of worse. Aftab has been in a relationship with Judy for 9 years and they've had their ups and downs with disagreements like all couples. Aftab says that over the years the arguments gradually escalated and she's hit and slapped him. He's been walking on eggshells in case he said or did the wrong thing and often Judy would get angry with him if he didn't do something she expected him to. Today, for the first time, Aftab retaliated by slapping Judy and pushing him away after she hit and slapped him. He is embarrassed to admit this as he hates men who hit women but he felt that the mental and physical abuse had gone for too long for him; that's when Judy grabbed a knife and stabbed him. It wasn't the first time she grabbed a knife but the first time she used it so now Aftab is afraid for himself and his son. Aftab says that Judy has a lot of past stress from her childhood and maybe that's why she behaves like that. Aftab and Judy have a 3 year-old boy who Judy expects Aftab to look after full-time and he's happy to do that as he loves him to bits. Aftab doesn't know where to turn or what his options are.

4. Perpetrator whose victim has used some violence

A perpetrator, as defined above in (2), who has experienced some violence from his victim but is presenting to a service initially at least as a victim. This is commonly someone whose victim has used or is using force to defend themselves or their children or as a means of defence from, prevention of, resistance against or frustration with the patterns of coercive control and fear the perpetrator (presenting as a victim) is using against them. When presenting to a service for male victims, this category of client tends to emphasise the violence used against them and use language of victimisation but nevertheless will talk about violence they have used or give other information which helps to identify what is going on.

Example: Olufeme and Ayo

Olufeme describes being 'wrongly arrested' by the police. He has a long list of complaints about the police. He says that he has been banned from his home town by the terms of a legal order. When asked by the worker how this order came about (as this is quite difficult to get) Olufeme says that he did hit his girlfriend Ayo but that she was 'disrespecting him' and that he also has marks from Ayo's abusive behaviour (his words) - he has scratches - but adds that he was able to 'deal with her'. When asked what this means, Olufeme says 'She deserves what she gets, she's argumentative and she knows what I am like - the police should have seen this, but they are all against men and believed her, just because she was crying and on the floor when they came'. Eventually he explains that Ayo was on the floor because Olufeme had been repeatedly kicking her. She had tried to push him off her, which he described as him being abused.

5. Mutual violence

Relationships which appear to be mutually violent, with control either exercised in both directions at different times or violent abusive behaviour without any apparent control of one or other party.

Example: Dave and Julie

Dave and Julie have been together for 5 years, married for 3 and they have a four year old daughter. Dave tells us that Julie has an alcohol problem which is also present in many of her family of origin. He says that she has hit him and bit him, including in front of other people. However, he also tells you that he has hit her, causing bruises. He says he has been arrested several times and had to spend a night in the police cells on one occasion when he assaulted her in the street. He was cautioned but not charged. He resents the fact he has been in trouble with the police and blames her. He says that Julie is not a fit mother and wants to separate from her and have custody of their daughter as he thinks she will not be safe living with Julie, plus his extended family have always been very involved in her care. He says they both want to separate but they are still living in the same house as they can't sell it. There is violence from each of them regularly. He doesn't say if this has happened in front of their daughter.

6. Unhappy relationship but not abusive

Men who are in relationships which are unhappy, experiencing and/or using unkind behaviour which, whilst unpleasant, is not causing fear or control. This often happens at the time of relationship breakdown – however, abuse and violence can also occur or increase at relationship breakdown, so it is important to assess whether or not this is really an abusive relationship. Sometimes men present to male victims services when there is no abuse – sometimes because they aren't sure who to turn to for help, sometimes because they aren't sure if they are living with domestic abuse or not and sometimes just because they want someone to listen to them.

Example: Aaron and Jamila

Aaron has a list of complaints about his partner, Jamila. He is not fearful of her, doesn't think she is fearful of him and says neither have used violence. They do regularly call each other names. He describes her not wanting to be in the same room as him. They are both critical of each other and unhappy.

7. Male victims being abused by a partner who is a former victim

Some men describe being abused by a perpetrator who has in the past been a victim. This is obviously not acceptable or safe and the men deserve protection, support and help just like any other victim. They are often very concerned about their partner and the impact of past abuse on her or him – if your service is working with both parties you may need to consider carefully how to challenge abusive behaviour in the perpetrator constructively, acknowledge the impact of past abuse but not let this become a justification for abusive behaviour.

Example: Liam and Noelle

Liam is engaged to be married to Noelle, his partner of 10 years, mother of his three children. He says he has a stable relationship with Noelle but that occasionally she physically attacks him when she has had too much to drink, which isn't often. He says he is bigger and stronger than her and that although he can deal with the physical side of this, such as a black eye or split lip, which he has had from her, he doesn't understand why this is happening to him. He says Noelle claims she can't remember the latest episode and was extremely upset when she saw his injuries the next day. He is scared that one day he might retaliate. He also wants to understand why Noelle is doing this. He thinks it might be because she has been abused in a past relationship – she has told him early on in their relationship about a past violent relationship and said she will never let that happen to her again.