CHAPTER 10

‘What About the Men?’

Understanding Men’s Experiences of Domestic Abuse Within a Gender-based Model of Violence

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Introduction

The explicit focus of this collection is violence against *women* and contributors in the volume are exclusively talking about the victimisation of women within domestically abusive relationships. Yet for those working and researching in the field of violence against women a question often heard is ‘What about male victims?’ It is the purpose of this chapter to provide a theoretical framework to explain and demonstrate why a gendered analysis is necessary for understanding domestic abuse. In doing so, the chapter will provide an overview of men’s experiences of abuse. It is imperative to note that a gender-based definition of domestic abuse does not exclude men, rather it positions violence within a gendered model of understanding that illustrates why women are predominantly ‘victims’ and men perpetrators. This chapter will provide a context for social workers who may have questions about

male victims so they can frame their daily practice with an understanding of the gendered nature of such violence.

The chapter begins by illustrating the specific case of Scotland and its working definition of domestic abuse as gender-based abuse. Then an overview of the concept of gender and what is meant by a gendered analysis is provided. From this the construction of violent masculine identities is explored drawing particularly on the work of Connell (1995, 2005). Research on men and women's use of familial violence is discussed and critiqued drawing upon the influential work of Johnson (1995, 2005) and Stark (2007). Then two case studies are presented (Gadd *et al.* 2002; Hester 2009), the findings from which support a gendered definition of domestic abuse. The evidence from both studies is that men and women use and experience violence differently and the impact of violence is different (because of their gendered position in society). They show that men who experience violence are less likely to live in fear and that women are more likely to be repeatedly victimised and subjected to abuse that can be described as coercive control (Stark 2007) or intimate terrorism (Johnson 1995, 2005). The need for a gendered analysis of violence and the implications this has for social work practice conclude the chapter.

The unique position of Scotland

Through the process of devolution and the creation of the Scottish Executive (in 1999) and the Scottish Government (in 2011) Scotland's policies now differ from those of the rest of the United Kingdom. In the United Kingdom, Scotland is the only country to recognise a gender-based definition of domestic abuse (see *National Strategy to Address Domestic Abuse in Scotland*, Scottish Executive 2000; *Preventing Violence Against Women: Action Across the Scottish Executive*, Scottish Executive 2001). This means that:

> Domestic abuse is associated with broader gender inequality and should be understood in its historical context, whereby societies have given greater status, wealth, influence, control and power to men. It is part of a range of behaviours constituting male abuse of power, and is linked to other forms of male violence. (Scottish Executive 2000, p.5)

In generating this definition the Scottish government acknowledges the 'broader gender inequalities which women face' (Scottish Executive 2000). These inequalities include, but are not limited to, economic, social, cultural and sexual inequities where women and girls are disadvantaged because of their gender, with the patterns and types of violence illustrating the persuasive inequalities between men and women (Bond and Phillips 2000). To begin to look at why a gendered definition is pertinent to the issue of violence we first need to look at the concept of gender.

What is gender?

Second wave feminism questioned the supposedly innate and natural differences that have been used to justify the divisions between men and women such as the dichotomous relationship between 'male aggression' and 'female passivity'. Such dichotomies have informed what Butler (1990) termed the 'bipolar gender that positioned men and masculinity as the norm and in opposition to 'the other' (de Beauvoir 1949).

Within this framework, gender is understood as a social construction and as a set of social relations. For the purposes of this chapter, gender refers to the range of socially constructed roles, behaviours, positions, responsibilities and expectations that are ascribed to men and women that inform ideas of how they are meant to act and behave. It does not refer to men and women *per se* but to the relationships between and among them. Gender is constructed discursively through language and performances and institutionally through people's positioning of their own identities in relation to social and cultural structures. Locating gender within wider cultural and historical contexts enables the mediation of other social factors such as class, sexualities, 'race' and ethnicity, thus conceptualising gender as a socially produced, continuously contested category that is perpetuated and negotiated at both ideological and institutional levels.

Connell (2000) stresses the importance of gender relations and the construction of a gender regime for understanding violence, and in particular men's violence. This view is echoed by Dragiewicz and Lindgren:

> …it is critical to view domestic violence within the context of sex discrimination in order to reframe the issue as one of societal and political concern rather than simply a private matter of interpersonal relationships. (Dragiewicz and Lindgren 2009, p.233)

To explore this further the concept of gender order as defined by Connell (1987) is examined before going on to discuss 'masculinities' and the social construction of violence.

The gender order

Connell (1987) argues that different organisations and institutions have gender regimes that interact or conflict with each other, generating a 'gender order'. The gender order changes over time, highlighting gender as transient and socially constructed. Therefore the gender order is maintained through both behaviour and practice. Within this order, differing forms of masculinity and femininity are ranked, with the most powerful and dominant at the top.

Connell invites the view that masculinity is a discourse to be accessed by, and imposed upon, both men and women, and not a character type or a label to describe men:

> 'Masculinity', to the extent that the term can be briefly identified at all, is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture. (Connell 2005, p.34)

Connell's (1995, 2005) theorisation of hegemonic masculinity as 'the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life' (Connell 2005, p.77) has proved of critical importance as a way to understand the construction of gender identity and the valorisation of violence. Connell's term refers to the most dominant (and dominating) form of masculinity which structures power relations among and between other masculinities and femininities and legitimates the use of power and control (see also Kimmel 1987).

It is important to note here that although not all men are equally privileged within or by patriarchal relations, all benefit from what Connell terms 'the patriarchal dividend' – the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women (2001, p.40). Whilst hegemonic masculinity is not necessarily the most common form of masculinity given it is 'a question of relations of cultural domination, not of head counts' (Connell 1993, p.610), nor is it the most attainable, it is, however, the most dominant. Connell asserts that power is the defining feature of hegemonic masculinity and that this power is symbolised through enactments of violence.

Violent masculinities

Violence is predominantly perpetrated by men and this has led to competing theorisations about the creation of a gendered (male) identity through the perpetration of violence. Yet this crude view of violence as a simplistic means to accomplish masculinity has been disputed (Gadd 2002). Therefore when analysing violence the focus needs to be upon men and their behaviour, rather than viewing it as an act that is constitutive of masculinity. Otherwise, masculinity is theorised as deterministic and resistant to change and men as violent because their masculinity constitutes their actions. This conceptual shift has succeeded in attributing the violence to men and removing the assumption of biological inevitability whilst acknowledging the plurality of men's violences (Hearn 1998, 2001).

Whilst it is crucial to identify that most violence is committed by men (from situations of war through to violence within families) it is equally important to recognise that not all men are violent (Connell 2000, p.215). Indeed, if all men were labelled as violent this would simply be perpetuating the taken for granted nature of sex differences discussed at the outset of this chapter. As such it is critical to acknowledge that men are not violent because of their 'biology', rather they exist in a culture where certain forms of masculine identities are esteemed above others. Connell's hegemonic masculinity is 'the successful claim to authority, more than direct violence, that is the mark of hegemony (although violence often underpins or supports authority)' (Connell 1987, p.39). However, such an ideology of masculinism sustains and perpetuates power on the basis of supposed biological difference securing the domination of men and the subjugation of women (Brittan 1989). It is pertinent however to acknowledge that the regularity and prevalence of men's violence constitutes 'acceptable' forms of normative masculinity. It is also often encapsulated by society's understanding of 'normal' interaction between men and women:

> [men's violence against women] is something that normal, ordinary men do routinely on a very substantial scale because they want to, because they think they have a right to and because nothing effective is done to stop them. (Itzin 2000, p.378)

As such, 'violence is not a deviant act; it is a conforming one' (Hatty 2000, p.1). Masculine identities are social constructions, with violent behaviour understood as a means chosen by some men, and boys,

to demonstrate this. In this way, much of men's violence needs to be understood as conscious, deliberate actions and as forms or examples of particular masculinities (Hearn 1998).

Why does gender matter in an analysis of violence?

In this context, in any study of violence it is crucial to analyse the role of gender. Hearn (1998) argues that all violence is gendered whether it is violence that is experienced, perpetrated or witnessed. We live in a society where the dominant social construction of masculinity rewards aggression (Connell 1987, 2005; Brownmiller 1975) and femininity is often constructed as passive, fearful and dependent (Connell 2005) which go on to inform stereotypes and myths around violence (Soothill and Walby 1991; Worrall 2004).

Stanko (2006) insists that gender matters in experiences of violence, in how we understand it and also in how people receive help and support as 'victims'. By ignoring gender, Stanko (2006, p.551) maintains that we risk 'impoverishing' any analyses of violence as gender is integral to 'the way we speak, conceptualise and challenge violence.' Research tells us that gender is the most significant risk factor for domestic abuse (Dobash and Dobash 2004; Johnson 1995, 2005; Stark 2007) which means that women are more likely to experience violence from their intimate (or estranged) partners than men are. It does not mean, however, that all perpetrators are men and all victims are female. What it indicates is that the intimate violence is taking place within wider structures of gender inequality. Gender is important in any analysis of violence because men and women use violence in different ways and have different motivations for doing so (Hester 2009).

Skinner, Hester and Malos (2005) maintain that 'gender violence' is a more inclusive term than 'violence against women' as it does not restrict itself to women but engages with the theoretical connection between violence and gender relations thus including gay and lesbian people as well as children and young people. The term gender violence also incorporates a wider definition of abuses and violations including prostitution and trafficking as well as violence where women are the perpetrators (Skinner *et al.* 2005, p.3). Gender also matters because violence is so often treated as gender-neutral through terms such as 'spousal abuse', 'date rape', 'sexual harassment', 'marital rape', 'battery' and 'child sexual abuse' (Hague and Malos 1998).

So what about the men?

Some commentators (e.g. Archer 2006; Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz 1980) and also men's rights groups have questioned the use of a gender-based definition of domestic abuse arguing that it excludes men in general, and male victims in particular. However, using a gendered analysis means taking into consideration the *differences* in men and women's lives, experiences and opportunities because of the socially ascribed roles of gender. It does not mean focusing solely upon women. It also provides a way to examine how the different social, economic and political structures impact men and women differentially because of gender-based stereotypes, abuses and inequalities.

The increase in attention to men as victims of domestic abuse has coincided with an increase or 'rising tide' of hyperbole on women's criminality more generally (Batchelor 2001 cited in Burman 2004; Batchelor 2007). The common-sense assumption perpetuated, in particular by the media (Burman, Brown and Batchelor 2003), is that women's violence is equal to that of men's (both in ferocity and occurrence). Such a view also propagates the biological view of violence as innate and as stemming from aggression thereby labelling 'violent women' as unnatural. Women's violence against men is much more anecdotal, not (as some of its supporters would argue) because of the shame silencing male victims (see Whiting's Chapter in this volume) but because it happens less frequently and on a much, much smaller scale (Gadd *et al.* 2002, 2003). Indeed, Gadd *et al.* (2003, p.113) warns against allowing anecdotal evidence to 'negate the vast body of social research that has demonstrated the motivatedness of perpetrators' accounts and the gendered power dynamics intrinsic to most abusive relationships.'

In terms of general victimisation, men are more likely to be victims of crime than women but the risk and pattern of violent victimisation is very different for men and for women (McMillan 2010, p.92). Indeed, McMillan goes on to argue:

> Women are the primary victims of violence and abuse in the home and within intimate relationships and are those most likely to be sexually victimised, most often by the men they know. The risk for women, then, is the men they love, live with, are related to and work with. (McMillan 2010, p.106)

Are women as violent as men?

There have been numerous studies that have looked at 'interpersonal' violence seeking to label men and women as equal combatants (Gelles 1983, 1987, 1993, 1997; Straus *et al.* 1980) undertaking 'mutual acts of aggression' (Fergusson, Horwood and Ridder 2005, p.1116) and endorsing women as being as violent as men (see Steinmetz 1977).[1]

Family violence research is most closely associated with the work of American sociologists Straus and Gelles (1986) who argue that violence is built into family life. Straus and Gelles developed the 'Conflict Tactics Scale' (CTS) to measure the controlling and abusive tactics couples may use against each other. Using this scale to measure results, Straus and Gelles conducted The National Family Violence Survey (NFVS) in 1975 and again in 1985 with a representative sample of married heterosexual couples in the USA. Their results showed that similar levels of partner violence were experienced and perpetrated by men and women. In half the cases, both partners were equally combative (violent) and in the remaining sample, the role of the primary perpetrator was divided equally between the sexes. From these results, Straus and Gelles claimed that the dominant family member uses violence in order to legitimise their position. They maintained that violence and/or conflict within the family arose from stress (from unemployment, health issues and financial insecurity) or as a means to 'solve' conflict (e.g. the smacking of children).

Family violence research has come under heavy criticism (Gadd *et al.* 2002; Gadd *et al.* 2003; Hester 2009; Johnson 1995; Kelly and Johnson 2008; Stanko 2006; Stark 2007). Although the dynamic of power is included in the analysis by Straus and Gelles, it is at an individualistic level, that is, particular to each family. It is also agendered research that does not take account of the gendered power dynamics that exist within the home. For example, the research has been criticised for interviewing respondents whilst other family members were present. It also under-sampled those women whose victimisation was likely to be more severe (separated and divorced women and those residing in refuges).

Whilst the NFVS showed that women sustained more injuries than men (Gelles 1993; Flood 1997) it did not include forms of victimisation women are more likely to experience such as sexual assault, suffocating and stalking (Gadd *et al.* 2002). The quantitative nature of the NFVS also

1 Steinmetz' (1977) study has since been discredited by several academic studies (Dobash *et al.* 1992; Kurz 1989; Straus 1999; Yllo 1988 cited in Johnson 2005, p.1129) but it is important to mention as it is often used as evidence (mainly by men's rights groups) that women are 'as violent' as men.

meant that the subjectivities and nuances of the encounters could not be determined (Renzetti 1999). The context, motivations and meanings of violence are crucial factors in feminist research into violence (Gadd *et al.* 2003; Hester 2009) and must be taken into account if a realistic understanding of violence in general and men's violence against women in particular is to be understood. Research continually contradicts the gender-symmetric view of violence evidenced in the NFVS as well as disputing the role of women as equal aggressors (Gadd *et al.* 2002; Johnson 2005; Stark 2007). The work of Johnson (1995, 2005) and Kelly and Johnson (2008) has been influential in highlighting the limitations of the Conflict Tactics Scale.

According to Johnson (1995, 2005) and Kelly and Johnson (2008) the differences in terms of intimate violence can be divided into two types: situational couple violence and coercive controlling violence (or intimate terrorism). Situational couple violence is when an argument escalates. It could be a one-off incident or more frequent, but there is not a desire to control the other partner. Intimate terrorism describes patterns of coercive control (see Stark, this volume) by one partner over the other, where physical violence may be one of the methods used to control. The differences between these forms of violence are critical. For example, Kelly and Johnson maintain that:

> when family sociologists and/or advocates for men claim that domestic violence is perpetrated equally by men and women, referring to the data from large survey studies, they are describing Situational Couple Violence, not Coercive Controlling Violence (…) these two types of violence differ in significant ways, including causes, participation, consequences to participants, and forms of intervention required. (Kelly and Johnson 2008, p.481)

In asking the question 'What about male victims?' there is a supposition that men and women experience violence in similar ways and in similar numbers, which fails to take account of the gendered nature of violence:

> Thus, although situational couple violence is nearly gender symmetric and not strongly related to gender attitudes, intimate terrorism (domestic violence) is almost entirely male perpetrated and is strongly related to gender attitudes (…) men's violence produces more frequent and more severe injuries, thereby producing a fear (or even terror)

> that is quite rare when women are violent toward their male partners. My intention is not to justify or minimize women's violence but to recognize it for what it is (mostly situational couple violence or violent resistance). (Johnson 2005, pp.1128–1129)

Kelly and Johnson (2008) list the reasons for this as, firstly, down to a man's physical size and strength and, secondly, individual misogyny and gender traditionalism (supported by research into children's attitudes to violence against women; see Lombard 2010). Thirdly, the meaning of violence differs greatly depending upon the gender of the perpetrator; and fourthly, heterosexual relationships are rooted in patriarchy and as such validate men's power. Finally, the broader social context in which the violence takes place is crucial. Women are unequal in violence because they are unequal in society, in terms of the resources and opportunities they can access (Stark 2007). Therefore to understand violence, we also need to take account of the wider social contexts:

> Violence is not, of course, a homogeneous phenomenon (…) Violence is (…) manifested within the wider framework of hatred towards specific groups, whether on grounds of sexual, religious or other forms of prejudice. Tackling violence in its varied forms, and dealing with its consequences, requires an understanding of its motivation and its wider social contexts. (Scottish Government 2003, p.11)

Whilst men can and do experience forms of domestic abuse, research has demonstrated that they experience it in a way that is different to that of women. This is illustrated below using two case studies which support a gender-based definition of violence.

Case studies

Male domestic abuse in Scotland

As was noted in the introduction to this chapter, the social and political context of Scotland is unique as it is the only country in the UK to recognise and facilitate a gender-based definition of domestic abuse. The gender-based definition used by the Scottish government has been subject to criticism from men's rights groups and other proponents of a gender-neutral definition, initially in 2000 and again in 2010. One of the strategies of men's rights groups in Scotland was to quote figures

from the 2000 Scottish Crime Survey (SCS) as 'proof' that men and women experienced similar levels of domestic abuse. The survey data shows that 19 per cent of women and 8 per cent of men had experienced either 'threats' or 'force' from their partners or ex-partners at some point in their lives (MVA 2000). The Scottish Executive commissioned research to examine these figures (see Gadd *et al.* 2002) and to look more generally at the context in which the domestic abuse occurred. The research team re-contacted[2] the men who had taken part in the Scottish Crime Survey, asking them to participate in an hour-long interview. The research found that one in four of the men had 'inaccurately reported experiences of force or threats from a partner in the SCS 2000 self-completion questionnaire' (Gadd *et al.* 2002, p.55). Some men had misinterpreted the question and had taken domestic abuse to mean any form of violence (or indeed a skirmish) within the home; for example a domestic burglary of a bicycle or a fist fight with a male relative in the garden.

The findings also revealed that men who reported being victims of abuse could be grouped into one of four categories: primary instigators; equal combatants; retaliators; or non-retaliatory victims (n indicates the number of men in this category):

- *Primary Instigators*: These are men who admitted that they instigated most of the abuse in their relationships (n = 1).
- *Equal Combatants*: These men argued that their relationships were equally abusive on both sides (n = 4).
- *Retaliators*: These men admitted having been abusive to their partners, but argued that this abuse occurred in the context of more prolonged or serious levels of abuse perpetrated against them by their partners (n = 8).
- *Non-Retaliatory Victims*: These men said they were victims of their partner's abuse, but had never retaliated and had only used force to restrain partners who were physically attacking them (n = 9).

(Gadd *et al.* 2002, p.38)

Many of the men who had identified themselves as victims in the survey were less likely than women to have been repeatedly victimised

2 The men had provided their contact details and agreed to being re-contacted at a later date.

or suffered serious injury. Also Gadd *et al.* (2002) identified that the majority of the men they spoke to 'did not consider themselves to be either "victims" of "crime" or of "domestic violence", although many were embarrassed by the abuse they had experienced' (2002, p.56). While there were a very small minority of men who maintained that they 'lived in fear' it was more common that the men interviewed were:

> more upset and/or angry about the *breakdown* of relationships in which abuse had occurred than the actual abuse itself. Separations between abused men and their partners occasionally resulted in distressing disputes over child custody, the family home and shared finances. (Gadd *et al.* 2002, p.56)

The results of this study highlighted that a number of the men interviewed were also perpetrators of the abuse, leading to the conclusion that '[d]ifferentiating perpetrators from victims in these cases is an irreconcilably contentious task' (Gadd *et al.* 2002, p.44). This finding substantiated previous work where men depicted themselves as victims of violence to exonerate themselves from blame (Gondolf 1988; Hearn 1998; Wolf-Light 1999 cited in Gadd *et al.* 2002, p.3). Also while men may be victims of domestic abuse they do not experience it in the same way as women. That is, men are less likely to live in fear of violence against them and it does not impact upon their daily lives as it does with female victims. Crucially, it was highlighted that specific services for male victims were not necessary (in terms of numbers and need); however, there was a lack of services and provision for gay men who were identified as victims of domestic abuse and in need of support. Gadd *et al.* (2003) state that:

> …there are many comprehensible reasons why the incidents of domestic abuse against men detected in crime surveys do not get reported to the police. Sometimes the incidents are trivial, non-criminal and/or inconsequential. Often domestic abuse against men is not repeated and hence victims prefer not to involve criminal justice practitioners. Sometimes male victims of domestic abuse are also perpetrators who fear incriminating themselves. (2003, p.112)

Who does what to whom?

The second case study draws upon the work of Hester (2009) which tracked cases of domestic violence over a period of six years. Hester states that a longitudinal study such as this reflects the pattern of

domestic abuse over time rather than focusing upon single incidents. Hester argues that crime figures cannot be looked at in isolation. When presented with police data on domestic abuse we need to look beyond the numbers to see the whole picture of who experiences what. Hester maintains that to understand who is affected by domestic violence/abuse we need to ask about prevalence, incidence and impact. Prevalence helps us to see how many people experience certain behaviours but not if they have any effect; incidence helps us to measure intensity and possibly severity; and impact allows us to see what effect and consequences the behaviours have and to see if services are needed (Hester 2011). In her analysis of police and interview data Hester found that the nature of incidents, levels of repeat perpetration and arrest and conviction could be differentiated by gender (Hester 2009, p.7). The arrest practices rates were in line with Association of Chief Police Officers ACPO guidelines which advised police officers to identify one perpetrator and one victim in each incident. Hester also found that men were significantly more likely to be repeat perpetrators and to use physical violence, threats and harassment (Hester 2009, pp.7–8). This confirmed earlier research by Gadd *et al.* (2002):

> The infrequency with which male victims appeared in Scottish recorded crime statistics relative to women was mostly due to gender differences in patterns of victimisation and not differential reporting patterns or police recording priorities. (2002, pp.21–24 cited in Gadd *et al.* 2003, p.99)

In addition, Hester also found that women were more likely to use a weapon (often for protection) and, because of this, were more likely to be arrested. However, such actions were not likely to induce fear; rather it was 'men's violence [that] tended to create a context of fear, and related to that, control. This was not similarly the case where women were perpetrators' (Hester 2009, p.8). Hester's research consolidates earlier research (Gadd *et al.* 2002; Johnson 2005; Stark 2007) which identifies that men and women use and experience violence in differing ways. Her findings also illustrate that while both men and women may come to the attention of the police, they may refuse to co-operate for different reasons; women out of fear and men because they were perpetrators (Hester 2009, p.19).

Hester identified that in examining domestic abuse we also need to look at the motivations and consequences of such behaviour on the 'victim'. Available survey data illustrates that the rate and the severity of

domestic abuse against women is greater than that experienced by men (Dobash *et al.* 1992; Gadd *et al.* 2002, 2003; Hester 2009). It is critical to look at incidence but also beyond this at the effect of those incidences; what Hester terms the impact of the violence. It is the impact of such violence that is more easily understood within a gendered analysis as women disproportionately experience it. For example, violence is more detrimental to their health, life and general wellbeing and this dictates the gendered nature of violence.

Gadd *et al.* (2003) maintain that of the men they interviewed, 'very few of the men's accounts lent support to the idea that there are substantial numbers of men living with the kinds of fears for their own safety' (2003, p.110). Time and time again, research studies identify that the impact of violent and abusive behaviour is most keenly experienced by women and girls (Barter and McCarry, this volume; Gadd *et al.* 2002; Hester 2009; Hoyle 2007; Lombard 2010). They stress that such violence is not 'incidence based', but rather it focuses upon repeat victimisation and the context of fear and control that is particular to women's victimisation by men.

Conclusions and implications for social work practice

The aim of this chapter has been to examine the reasons for gender-based definitions of domestic abuse. The purpose has not been to argue that all women are victims of domestic abuse and all men are perpetrators. Rather, by introducing a gender analysis to understand violence social workers can examine the complexities of the situation by looking beyond the particular incident and looking at the wider context. There is a need to recognise that our everyday understanding of men's and women's violence is informed by, and based upon, our perceptions of gender. Women's violence is often judged to be 'unnatural' and as going against traditional notions of femininity (Burman 2004; Edwards 1984; Worrall 2004). Men are framed by cultural understandings of what it is to be a man with physical prowess, protection, anger and entitlement all bound up in expectations of men and masculinity.

When encountering cases of domestic abuse in the course of social work practice individual practitioners use their existing knowledge and understandings to interpret what is being said, and by whom. Whilst their presence that day may be as the result of a particular occurrence of domestic abuse, that one 'incident' should always be framed by the wider context of gender-based abuse and within a framework of fear

and inequality. A woman's agency and the choices she makes need to be respected. Practitioners cannot simply advise a woman to leave. She will be scared of the repercussions – what he may do to her, the children, whether her children will be taken from her. Her situation is complex and multifarious; it is not just a simple question of her moving out.

Related to this is the assumption that it is the woman's responsibility to stop the violence by leaving. Within this gendered framework of abuse the question that needs to be asked is not 'Why doesn't she leave?' but 'Why doesn't he stop?' It is frustrating for social workers (and others) to continue to see a woman remain but her reasons for doing so need to be located within a gendered analysis of her situation that emphasise her possible lack of access to material and social resources as well as the situation of fear and control she is living within.

Often practitioners dealing with domestic abuse may suggest that within a family, the couple are 'both as bad as each other' or question 'But what about the men?' Whilst some men may experience violence within the home and women may be perpetrators of that violence it is argued here that such an assertion needs to be examined critically within a gendered analysis to fully understand the context, motivations and impact of the violence upon the man and the woman involved.

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