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*“EVERYONE KNEW BUT FOR SOME
REASON NOTHING WAS DONE”*

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF
DOMESTIC ABUSE ON FATHERS AND
CHILDREN

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AIMS OF THE TALK

- Review some of the literature of men's experiences of abuse – including a consideration of their fear
- How this impacts men as fathers
- How domestic abuse impacts children growing up on homes where they are exposed to this violence

EMERGENCE OF MALE VICTIMS

- Early models of Domestic Violence (e.g., Duluth)
- Early research using act-based measures highlighted women's perpetration and men's victimisation as well as the prevalence within same-sex relationships
- Criticisms of this research and claims about prevalence of male victims
- Over last 15 years there has been an in-depth exploration of men's experiences and needs

“INGROUPS”

- Heterosexual adult female victims
- Heterosexual adult male perpetrators

OUTGROUPS

- Male victims
- Older adults
- LGBTQ+ victims
- Adolescent victims
- Children in homes where violence/abuse between adults occurs
- Parents with children who perpetrate violence against them
- Sibling victims



OUTGROUPS

- Male victims
- Children in homes where violence/abuse between adults occurs

PHYSICAL ABUSE

- Hines et al. (2007) – 190 male callers to DAHM
 - 52.4% of callers indicated that they were fearful that their female partners would cause a serious injury
 - Most common types were slapped/hit (42.7%), pushed (41.8%), kicked (39.2%) punched (24.7%)
- Bates (e.g., 2020)
 - . . . *throwing anything she could get her hands on from tv remotes to ornaments. I used to get punched, slapped and kicked as well.*
 - *The worst example was a night when she doused the bed in paraffin, set fire to it with me asleep, turned the power off and waited by the switch with a hammer*
 - *She also had a habit of attacking me later when I was sleeping, which meant that sleep was hard as I couldn't relax at all.*
 - *Broke her hand punching me to the rear of the head. . . . Attempted to stab me with a kitchen knife.*

SEXUAL ABUSE

- Prevalence
 - ONS (2018) 39% of men reported experiencing rape or assault by penetration (including attempts) from a partner or ex-partner
- Bates and Weare (2020)
 - *She started trying to have sex with me and I told her I did not want to as I was drunk and very tired and felt sick. She didn't take that as an answer and started hurting me, forcing herself on me, hands around my neck, telling me I would do it or she would kill me*
 - *I went to bed early telling her I was going to take a sleeping tablet while she stayed up and drank, then about 2am, I woke, she was on top of me, raping me. After that I was destroyed. I didn't go home unless I could avoid it, I was scared*
 - *At a work meeting I opened my diary and she had placed a letter in it stating that she was pregnant and had come off the pill deliberately . . . I felt totally violated*

PSYCHOLOGICAL/EMOTIONAL ABUSE AND CONTROL

- Hines et al. (2007)
 - 94.8% said control including coercion and threats (77.6%), emotional abuse (74.1%), intimidation (63.3%)
- Bates (2020)
 - *I'd have to bring proof of purchase for milk when she would send me to the shops and ring her when in the shops to prove that I was there and only there.*
 - *Threatened to slit her throat and daughters if I didn't come back*
 - *She controlled my friendships and controlled my contact with my family as best she could. This would include logging onto my emails and sending emails to my family pretending to be me*
- Identity specific experiences: "She convinced me I had Alzheimer's and tried to force me to sign a legal paper to declare me incompetent." (Bates & Carthy, 2020; P1)

IMPACT OF THEIR EXPERIENCES (BATES, 2020B)

- “I tried to kill myself...I ate all the sleeping pills I could find, drank a bit, and was happy that it was over. I woke up next to her, It was the worst moment in my life, I was still in hell” (P141)
- “It is over and has been for 18 years but I live it as if it happens everyday due to my PTSD...I am disabled by my mental illnesses now and I am housebound. It destroyed my life and robbed me of a future. That is how it impacted me, I fear.” (P8)
- “I feel alone. I have little to no friends left” (P75)

POST-SEPARATION PHYSICAL VIOLENCE AND CONTROL (BATES ET AL., 2023)

- “She punched, punched and scratched me while I was holding my children after we broke up.” (Participant 60)
- “It got worse. I had petrol poured through my letterbox, non-stop threats, knocked concussed and hospitalised. Stabbed.” (Participant 84)
- “I moved into a separate part of the house, (large enough house to do that). We crossed on the stairs and she stopped me and said, “I wonder what the police will say if I fall down the stairs and hurt myself and tell them you assaulted me?”.” (Participant 45)
- “Since she moved out she has continued to stalk me (obtained passwords and login information for my phone and Google account somehow)” (Participant 16)

FEAR

- Evolutionary theories around fear (e.g., Campbell, 2006)
- Monckton Smith in her work around coercive control and domestic homicide:
 - Immediate fear
 - Chronic fear
- Evidence suggests women have higher levels of fear
- Factors predicting women's fear – frequency of abuse but...
 - 51.4% of the abused women did not fear their husband, boyfriend, or companion (Hightower et al., 2000)
 - 46% in later study (Apsler et al., 2002)
- Fontes (2007) confirmed that men suppress their fear and pain and find it difficult to report their abuse because they are socialized to be physically and emotionally strong providers for women and children

FEAR OF CONSEQUENCES

- Taylor, Magnussen, and Amundson (2001) described accounts of battered women:
 - The unpredictability that creates an environment where the victim constantly worries what will happen next, and a need to attend to their own behaviour
 - Links with “hypervigilance,” which is one of Walker’s (1980) suggested symptoms of “battered woman syndrome”: women become hypervigilant at pre-empting and predicting an attack
- *“At the beginning of the relationship she would become violent. After about five years the physical violence went away and the emotional rollercoaster was a lot worse.”* (Bates, 2020; P86)

FEAR OF SAFETY

- Hines et al. (2007) – 52.4% of callers were fearful their female partners would cause a serious injury if she found out they had called the helpline
- 24.2% of men feared she'd kill him or someone he loves if he leaves (Hines & Douglas 2010)
- Storey and Strand (2012) – 21% extremely fearful of the perpetrator
- Houry et al. (2008) - 29.2% of men indicated that they felt controlled, unsafe and fearful of their partner, with these perceptions associated with depressive and PTSD symptoms
- Third party reporters e.g. Hogan et al. (2012) counsellors working with male victims
- Fear of further harm from partner (Tsui et al., 2010) – not as common as for women but still there

FEAR OF JUDGEMENT AND DISCLOSURE

- Fear of being judged by others (e.g., Lysova et al. 2020)
- Huntley et al. (2019) systematic review – internal (shame, perceptions of weakness) and external pressures (not being believed, fear of being accused of being a perpetrator)
- Group specific fear e.g., fearing deportation (e.g., Voolma, 2018), fear of being outed (e.g., Laskey et al., 2019)
- Not being believed - Poor responses by services including ignored, referred to batterer programme (e.g., Douglas & Hines, 2011)
- Experiences of victim blaming (e.g., McCarrick et al., 2016) – often seen in attitudes literature too Taylor & Sorenson, 2005)
- Including by police
 - Impact reporting (Drijber et al., 2013)
 - *I reported her to the Police on one occasion and was asked what I had done to deserve the beating, I told them I had done nothing at all, to which they told me that was unlikely and it was probably something I had done or said. (Bates, 2020; P32)*

FEAR OF ALLEGATIONS

- Taylor et al. 2021 - *“My life now revolves around fear of further allegations and I have had to install tracker app on my phone and Video cameras in my car and outside my house so as to protect myself from further false allegations” (Participant 54, 44 years).*
- Bates (2020) – *“I have never attacked her or fought back at all. I have tried to restrain her at times to prevent her from attacking me . . . she would then show me bruises a couple of days later and tell me that she could report me to the police for assault and that they would believe her story.” (P120)*

FEAR - CHILDREN

- Fear can also motivate women to leave – (Heron et al., 2022) e.g. fear of losing children but fear FOR children
- Taylor et al. (2021) - *“I had both a fear of not seeing our son and for his safety”* (Participant 25, 38 years)
- Bates (2020) - *The constant threats of never seeing my children again and not having anywhere to go made me stay longer than I should have. (P10)*
- Ongoing Bates and Taylor (2021) - For fathers, the use of the children was described as a purposeful choice to continue to exert control by their ex-partners.
- Bates and Hine (2023) – many of the threats are actualised e.g. *“After we agree...my former spouse disappeared with the children for over 3 years until found by the police.”* (P105)

POST- SEPARATION “RECOVERY”



Photo elicitation study ($N=16$)



“Recovery”



Coping, moving on, living
with...language



Individual, social and systemic
factors

POWER

- “Yes. I know, it's, it's funny, you could go long periods of time with everything ok, and then it would all fall apart again. And quite often there was a, an affair in there at that point, erm and [sighs] I wouldn't say I... yeah I would say, I did stay, I stayed for the children. I didn't maybe understand I stayed for the children but... it was made abundantly clear to me if I left I would not see my children ever again.” (P6)
- “eventually she err, she was pregnant with NAME, my daughter, and that just opened up a whole new avenue of control. Erm... it was you know [stutters], you know, ‘You can't leave. Don't leave me’, you know, ‘You can't leave me, or you'll never see her’ and this that and the other, and it was... [Sigh].” (P8)

FAILURE AND SELF- BLAME

- *“But err, I don’t see one of, one of my children, that to me is a complete failure, I feel like a complete failure as a father. How could I not get through to her, I probably will never see her again” (P6)*
- *“But I have abandoned him, haven’t I? I have left him in that situation” (P9)*
- *“I suppose it was a erm...a relationship in which I was dominated. Erm it is something that I recognise that I have allowed myself. Erm I played my part in allowing that. Erm and understand a little bit more about myself following the relationship.” (P15)*

LOSS

- *“that’s the most powerful physical representation of how this process feels that I’ve ever seen or heard of. It’s just like being hollowed out. It’s just like being a big man with a small head and no insides” (P3)*
- *“I’ve never felt such absolute devastating loss, and I couldn’t, I couldn’t work that out. I just knew that it was highly likely that that I take, that I might give up.” (P13)*

WHAT IS PARENTAL ALIENATION?

- Parental alienation is a term coined by Gardner (e.g., 2002)
- It involves one parent manipulating and damaging the child's relationship with the other "target" parent
- The evidence around this concept is mixed
- As a type of aggression it is often seen as atypical due to a lack of widespread acceptance or understanding of the concept (Harman, Kruk & Hines, 2018).
- Tactics include direct and indirect means
 - Denigration, humiliation, undermining, lying and manipulation
 - False allegations, breaching court orders
- False allegations as the "silver bullet" within custody disputes because of the impact it can have in affecting the target parent getting access and contact (Harman et al., 2018; p.1284)
- Controversy

EXPERIENCES OF FATHERS

- The traditional family structure has not always facilitated or encouraged father involvement (McBride et al., 2005); this perception may have informed a stereotype that fathers feel less invested or experience less involvement in the parental role.
- Research has demonstrated that the importance of the father identity to individual men has predicted future levels of fathers' involvement (Goldberg, 2015), but where this identity is central to men, this may create an opportunity to be manipulated.
- Non-resident male parents have described the loss of their partner and their access to their children as leaving them at a loss and feeling unsure in their identity (Corcoran, 2005).
- Estrangement reduces levels of psychological well-being and increases experiences of loss and perceptions of stigma (Blake, 2017).

MANIPULATION OF THE PARENTAL RELATIONSHIP (BATES & HINE, 2020)

- “I haven't seen my children for almost 9 years.”
- “Towards the end of our relationship she was telling the children that I spent time at work to get away from them...”
- “She was worried about her mother if she left her alone to meet me, because her mother told her, that she is so sad when her daughter was not there.”

ALIENATING BEHAVIOURS

- “After we agreed to week about care and a huge financial settlement, my former spouse disappeared with the children for over 3 years until found by the police”
- “she continues to control everything , even though there is now a shared residence order she continually books the children into activities that clash with my time with them , I have to agree otherwise contact stops”
- “she regularly disobeys court orders over contact and her and her partner make regular threats to my safety in front of the children. the police do nothing the court orders are not enforced by social services etc”
- “Initially it continued unaffected, but...her new husband demanded that my son call him "dad", and he started calling me by my first name.”

IMPACT ON THE FATHERS

- “I tried to kill myself and ended up sleeping rough for 2 years”
- “Almost broken me...I don't know how I'm still alive”
- “I've never felt depression so deeply before.”
- “Sometimes I will just cry on my own because I miss him it's taken a toll on my mental health”
- “I have anxiety attacks when I know I have to be in her presence or at handover etc. I am anxious that something will happen to him when I have contact - I am glad when he goes back with no scratches or bumps.”

IMPACT ON CHILDREN

- “My parents have seen the boys recently. The oldest is not doing well at school since contact stopped.”
- “The children have suffered enormous emotional and psychological harm.”
- “I believe it has destroyed his childhood.”

CHILD AND YOUNG PEOPLE STATISTICS

1

An estimated 1 in 5 children in the UK live with domestic violence (Skafida et al., 2019)

2

It is estimated that 130,000 children live in homes where there is high-risk domestic abuse (Safelives, 2020)

3

Almost half of 18-34 year olds reported witnessing a parent being a victim of domestic abuse (Hestia, 2019)

RESEARCH: CHILDREN

- Historically constructed as witnesses not victims
- The use of this terminology to describe their status was contested because of its influence on the construction and treatment of children within services (Callaghan et al., 2018)
- The Domestic Abuse Act (2021) now makes explicit reference to children as victims if *“they see, hear, or experience the effects of the abuse...”*
- Traditional arguments suggest if children were asleep or out of sight there would be little impact – we position this difficult unless we situate it within a socio-politically convenient or wilful blindness narrative (Heffernan, 2011)
- Solutions focus on parenting classes - the trauma of their experiences is rarely addressed
- They have rarely disclosed their experiences or been asked to

IMPACT ON CHILDREN

- **Children who grow up in families** affected by **domestic violence** and abuse are at:
 - Higher risk of mental health difficulties throughout their lives (e.g., Peltonen et al., 2010),
 - Elevated risk of physical health difficulties (e.g., Bair-Merritt et al., 2006);
 - More interpersonal difficulties in intimate relationships and friendships (e.g., Siegel, 2013).
 - More vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation, and becoming involved in violent relationships themselves (e.g., Turner et al., 2010).
 - There may also be lasting neurological impact (e.g., Choi et al., 2012)
- A “deficit” based model

TEENAGE BOYS – “SOPHIE’S CHOICE”

- 92.4% of refuges are currently able to accommodate male children aged 12 or under.
- This reduces to 79.8% for male children aged 14 and under, and to 49.4% for male children aged 16 and under.
- Only 19.4% of refuges are able to accommodate male children aged 17 or over
- No stats for male safe accommodation but could be as low as 10% will accept men with their children

MOST RESEARCH TO DATE HAS ASKED PARENTS AND TEACHERS ABOUT THE CHILD'S EXPERIENCES

- Where is the child's voice?
- Ethical and practical barriers inhibited us from working directly with under 18 year olds.
- We were also cognisant that when you are in the experience it can be hard to articulate, recognise or share your experiences.
- Sometimes looking back from a place of safety (physical) if not psychological, can be helpful.

QUESTIONNAIRE SUMMARY DATA

- 114 participants, over 18 years, self-defined victim/survivors/ social media
- 112 sets of full data to report
- **Demographics**
 - 21% male
 - 79% female
 - Average age 37 years
 - Range 18-61 years
 - 99% White British
 - 99% UK based citizens



ABUSE EXPERIENCED WITHIN THE FAMILY

CHILDREN – BOY'S EXPERIENCES

(TAYLOR, BATES & WRIGHT, 2023)

- “My father beat my mother, and me when I tried to stop him. He was a very cruel man, especially with animals. He enjoyed scaring me, as he thought I was “Too soft”. He would vocalise this regularly and use psychological abuses to “Toughen me up”. He would lock me in a dark room all night as a punishment...” (Participant 5, 29 years).
- “Emotional, psychological, and physical. My mother was the emotional and physical abuser. Dad tried to leave mum often, but he never actually did. I had to protect my little sister from Mum, I am the oldest. If there was a perceived transgression e.g., something was broken in a normal childhood accident, we were confronted together and told own up, or you are both punished (I owned up even if it was my sister) to protect her from the hit that would follow” (Participant 15, 50 years).
- “My parents separated when we were 6-7 years old and we went to live with our father and step - mother. I didn't see him [dad] being hit but I saw him being verbally abused, chastised, ridiculed and made to drink alcohol with her. My brother and I were also victimised, in one instance, following a minor transgression, I was told to go upstairs to my bedroom and take my clothes off..... I took my clothes off and she beat me with a coat hanger.” (Participant 19, 53 years).

CHILDREN – BOY'S EXPERIENCES (TAYLOR, BATES & WRIGHT, 2023)

- Impact as children:
 - *“It was extremely frightening most of the time. Occasional bouts of normal kind behaviours, but very short lived” (Participant 16, 52 years).*
 - *“The sense of anticipation would wear me down ... saps your energy” (Participant 3, 22 years).*
- Impact as adults:
 - *“Yes. I have ongoing mental health input. My relationships are unstable” (Participant 2, 19 years)*
 - *“Yes, absolutely, in ways that this box would never be big enough to tell all. I ended up with an anxious attachment and not because of an early attachment issue but due to my experiences from aged seven onwards. Like as a child I would try to please, appease and placate and it isn't an emotionally healthy place to be as an adult in an adult relationship. Conversely, I started out as an angry adult and was not the nicest of people when I look back 20-30 years and refer to that time to myself as an 'emotional retard” (Participant 19, 53 years).*

CHILDREN – BARRIERS TO HELP-SEEKING

- Wider child abuse disclosure literature points to shame, self-blame and fear as being significant barriers to help-seeking (e.g., Alaggia et al., 2019)
- The importance of a person to trust and being asked directly, as key facilitators (e.g., Brennan & McElvaney, 2020)
- From the DA literature:
 - Failure to ask and hear what the accounts of children and young people in the context of DA is even more impactful because of their experience of abuse in the home
 - These are “voices already silenced by violence and coercion in the family” (Callaghan et al., 2017, p.3371)
 - Överlien and Hydén (2009) stress the importance of seeing each child as an agent within a context and relational situation.

CHILDREN – BARRIERS (BATES & TAYLOR, 2023)

- 64.8% (of N = 105) never disclosed abuse:
 - *“My entire family knew it was happening and did nothing, what could a child do?” (Participant 83)*
 - *“I was too scared of my dad and of becoming homeless. Not to mention he was in the police.” (Participant 53)*
 - *“I didn’t know it wasn’t normal or acceptable at the time. That was just how it was at home - I had no way of knowing that wasn’t how everyone else’s home life was....I didn’t know what it was or what constituted domestic violence so there was nothing to tell.” (Participant 23)*
- Those who did disclose:
 - *“I told school friends, but nothing came of it. I also told various CAMHS professionals what was going on at home but they didn’t say anything I attempted to hint towards the abuse to teachers, but they didn’t seem to pick up on the hints” (Participant 50)*
 - *“... trouble is with family is they want to believe everything is lovely and saying it isn't destroys their sense of close, family safety. Guess this is why people don't believe people who say they experienced abuse - it undermines their own sense of intimate safety. Or reminds them of things that they felt weren't right but buried deep and have ignored for years. (On the other hand tough shit! Abuse should be reported, believed and stopped)” (Participant 32)*

CHILDREN – BARRIERS (BATES & TAYLOR, 2023)

- 53.3% had never been asked about their home life
 - *“Everyone knew but for some reason nothing was done. It’s kinda weird to think that social workers weren’t called.” (Participant 20)*
 - *“Yes - teachers grandmother aunts all asked but when told the truth were embarrassed by it and did nothing. That was actually harder. We were told to make sure we looked after our mother too.” (Participant 85)*
 - *“I also had an English teacher who questioned me in subtle ways. She was gradually building that trusting relationship, but I pulled back. I was 14 and not used to someone showing any kind of care towards me. I started bunking her lessons too.” (Participant 70)*

CHILDREN – BARRIERS (BATES & TAYLOR, 2023)

- Support they would have liked:
 - *“Someone to talk to who doesn’t just push the responsibility back onto the child not to antagonise them.” (Participant 4)*
 - *“Someone to talk to who is independent of school and parents.” (Participant 8)*
 - *“Find a person who you can speak to. Have champions for children that allow them to speak confidentially without being in a school environment.” (Participant 28)*
 - *“Restorative programmes like Choices for Change from Restorative Change” (Participant 34)*
 - *“Counselling or a psychologist” (Participant 44)*
 - *School safeguarding leads recognising and taking seriously any possible behaviours that could be related to abuse” (Participant 70)*
 - *“After school clubs that have a safe space for children, schools to actively have checks in place for kids, checking attendance and checking up on it, available counselling, staff to be proactive in seeing dirty clothes, foul smells, anxieties to be checked up on not scolded and punished by teachers for being off school or late.” (Participant 102)*

IMPLICATIONS AND FINAL THOUGHTS

- Men's experiences of abuse – including their post-separation experiences
- For men who are fathers, the abuse related to their children is often the most painful aspect
- For children, they are often left feeling powerless and invisible, even when they disclose or share
- Working towards truly gender inclusive and responsive provision to help all victims and their children

THANK YOU!

- Thank you to my collaborators at UoC and beyond
- Happy to share any of the papers I've mentioned today
- Any questions?
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