



Common Myths about Intimate Partner Violence against Men

MYTH: In 85% of family violence cases the victims are women beaten by male partners. Male victims of intimate partner violence are rare.

REALITY: According to the [National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey](#) (NISVS 2010):

- About **1 in 7** men [and **1 in 4** women] have experienced severe physical violence by an intimate partner at some point in their lifetime.
- **1 in 19** men [and **1 in 5** women] have experienced stalking victimization at some point during their lifetime in which they felt very fearful or believed that they or someone close to them would be harmed or killed.
- Almost 53 percent of male victims experienced some form of intimate partner violence for the first time before age of 25.
- More than one-quarter of male rape victims were first raped when they were 10 years old or younger.
- Male victims of violence (sexual violence, stalking, intimate partner violence) were significantly more likely to report physical and mental health problems than male non-victims.

Women's advocates argue that since women are the more physically injured gender in domestic violence disputes and they represent the majority of homicide cases, services for victims need to continue to be focused on violence against women. However, men's advocates argue that services should be made gender inclusive, after all, without public awareness and services how will men know they are being victimized?

MYTH: The traditional domestic violence shelter programs offer the exact same services to both female and male victims.

REALITY: "According to an [online survey](#) conducted by Clark University psychologist Denise Hines and funded by the National Institute of Mental Health, of 132 men who approached a domestic violence agency for help, "over three-quarters of them were told, 'we only help women.'"

Advocates at DAHMW have reached out to domestic violence shelter programs across the country for years in search of services for male victims who call our helpline. More often than not the response to our query has been, "we don't help men," "our services are for women and children only," and "we offer the same services to everyone...except we don't shelter men...we refer them to the local homeless shelter and we don't offer victim support groups for men either."



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Support groups offered at shelter programs give survivors an opportunity learn more about the dynamics of partner violence and share information, experiences, and hope with other survivors. Support groups can be an integral part of the healing process for survivors of partner violence.

So few support groups are available to male survivors that law enforcement, domestic violence advocates and the courts will, at times, refer male survivors to batterer's intervention programs. Batterer's intervention programs are no place for survivors and no substitute for support groups.

In an article on "The Good Men Project's" website aptly titled, "[Can We Degenderize Domestic Violence?](#)" Iain Gill, Education Director of the Gay Men's Domestic Violence Project in Boston, Massachusetts had this to say about services for men, "...domestic violence programs are contractually obligated to have open services for everybody, including straight men and GLBT (Gay, Lesbian, Bi-Sexual and Transgender) people, but many don't do it. We get a high number of heterosexual men calling for support, and the only access to services they have is through a GLBT program because there are no straight male organizations or services.... [heterosexual male victims are] the bottom of the barrel."

In addition, hotline workers at traditional domestic violence shelter programs add insult to injury by referring their male victim hotline callers to local homeless shelters and batterer's intervention programs. Further, most domestic violence shelter programs in the US refuse to shelter teen boys who accompany their mothers. Abused women with teen boys who need emergency shelter are instructed to find alternative housing with a relative or friend for their teen boys.

MYTH: Real men "handle" their women. Only weak, wimpy men allow themselves to be abused by women.

REALITY: This myth equates being a male victim of domestic abuse with being less than a man, however, **not** striking back a woman who is assaulting you takes a good deal of restraint and fortitude. In all actuality real men don't hit women.

DAHMW helpline callers who have been put in these difficult situations have told us why they chose not to defend themselves against their partner's physical assaults. The three most cited reasons are;

- As young boys their parents instilled in them that boys never hit girls and that idiom has stuck with them into their adulthood.



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- They realize that they are, in general, larger and stronger than their partners and therefore they could cause serious physical harm to their partners should they fight back.
- If they defend or protect themselves and the police are called, due to mandatory and pro-arrest policies, they risk being arrested as the perpetrator/aggressor.

MYTH: In a domestic dispute, the bigger, stronger person in the relationship is the abuser and the smaller, weaker person in the relationship is the victim.

REALITY: Someone who is 5' 4", weighs 150 pounds, and is prone to violence and enraged can do a great deal of harm and physical injury to someone who is 6' 2", weighs 220 pounds, and is a non-violent person. Size, weight, and/or being muscular are not good indicators of whether or not someone will be a victim or an abuser.

This myth focuses only on the physical aspects of domestic violence. An abusive partner does not need to be bigger or stronger to use intimidation and threats, rip a phone off the wall to prevent their victim from calling for help or to use a gun/wield a knife against their victim.

MYTH: If it was that bad he would leave, men can easily leave abusive relationships.

REALITY: This myth assumes that, unlike a battered woman who is financially dependent on her abuser and lacks the resources to escape the violence, a man who is in an abusive relationship has a job and the financial resources to just pick up and leave. However, male victims face many of the same hurdles that female victims face.

According to the fact sheet, ["A Closer Look at Men Who Sustain Intimate Partner Terrorism by Women,"](#) men stay because:

- They are concerned about the children.
- When they get married, it was for life.
- They love their partners.
- They fear that they will never see their children again.
- They think their abusive partners will change.
- They don't have enough money to leave.
- They have nowhere to go.
- They are embarrassed.
- They don't want to separate the children from their mothers.
- Their abusers have threatened to kill themselves.
- They fear she will kill them/someone they love.



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Leaving is often more difficult than staying in an abusive relationship. Incidents of domestic violence have been found to increase in severity when a victim leaves. Leaving an abusive situation requires resources such as money, housing, transportation, and support structures, all of which is not, in general, available to male victims.

MYTH: Domestic violence is caused by stress/PMS/alcohol and/or drug abuse. Abusers don't mean to hurt their loved ones, it's not their fault; they can't help it.

REALITY: Perpetrators of partner violence are experts at manipulating situations and blaming other people, places and things for their abusive behavior. However, there is no excuse for emotional, physical or sexual violence.

Intimate partner violence is a learned behavior. It is defined as a pattern of coercive behaviors used by one partner to gain control and power over the other partner. It may include the use of physical and sexual violence, verbal and emotional abuse, stalking and economic abuse. Sexual, emotional and psychological intimidation may also occur.

Abusers, whether they are male or female, do not suffer a loss of control that "causes" them to act out violently towards their loved ones. They make a conscious personal choice to use violence.

MYTH: Intimate partner violence doesn't affect the children in the home.

REALITY: Children who witness domestic violence learn that violent behavior is an acceptable form of communication. This is likely to lead such children to be domestically violent or choose relationships with violent intimate partners when they mature into adults.

Children who witness domestic violence grow up in a climate of insecurity and anxiety. They may manifest behavioral problems as they get older, abuse alcohol or drugs, and get into trouble with the law.



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MYTH: The increase in women being arrested for domestic violence is due to law enforcement misinterpreting self defense by women against their male intimates as aggressive behavior. Women are rarely, if ever, the aggressor in domestic violence disputes. However, when men tell law enforcement that they had to resort to self defense against their female abusers they are rarely being truthful.

According to battered women's advocates mandatory and pro-arrest policies for domestic assault have had some unintended consequences. Crime statistics show that there has been an increase in women being arrested for domestic assault since mandatory and pro-arrest policies went into effect.

Women's advocates rationalize the increase in arrests of women could be due to the following: police officers mistaking defensive marks on the man i.e. scratches and red welts etc. for aggressive marks made by the woman and incorrectly arresting the "female victim" and; "male abusers: getting "one up" on their victims by calling 911 first thus pretending to be the victim; or that "male abusers" are purposely injuring themselves before the police arrive so that their female partners will be arrested.

When law enforcement can't determine who the aggressor in the domestic dispute is they will arrest both parties and let the courts sort it out. Women's advocates have stressed that dual arrests re-victimizes female victims. Women's advocates attribute these dual arrests to improper training of police officers.

To say that women are being truthful when they claim self defense and men are lying is unjust and bias. Relatively little research has been done in this area to prove or disprove this assumption. Denise Hines Ph.D. research on [men's experiences](#) with partner aggression and help seeking found that male victims also experience being arrested for defending themselves against their attackers. Abusers, both male and female, are experts at manipulation and deceit.