

It's **YOUR** business

Male Victims of Female Violence

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Perhaps the most contentious and least understood aspect of domestic violence is the issue of female-to-male partner violence. In the early years of advocacy, research, and policy on family violence, violence toward men was explained away as exclusively carried out in self-defense, an insignificant or distracting aberration that took the focus off the true victims – women or an overstated phenomenon resulting from methodological biases and errors in research. Although the extent and seriousness of violence toward men is not as great as violence toward women, not all female-to-male violence is done in self-defense. Research is consistent in finding higher than expected rates of violence toward men, and rather than being a distraction, violence toward men ought to be considered a significant part of the problem of domestic violence.

Nearly every representative survey of the problem of family violence finds higher than expected rates of violence toward men (*for a full review see Straus, 2005*). The rate is often the same or even higher than that reported for male-to-female violence. Moreover, surveys indicate that women initiate violence about as often as men (*Straus, 2005*).

Surveys of crime victims in the United States find higher rates of violence towards women than towards men – women's reports of victimization by partners or ex-partners is 10 times higher than reports by men (*Rennison, 2003*). The most recent analysis of the National Crime Victimization survey projected 103,220 men who were victims of intimate partner violence (*Rennison, 2003*). Many more women are killed by the male partners in the United States – 1247 in 2000 compared to 440 women who murdered their male partners (*Rennison, 2003*).

The controversies notwithstanding, it is clear that women use violence towards their male partners, that a great deal of domestic violence is bi-directional, and that a small but important number of women are the sole perpetrators of violence in their intimate relationships.

Why should we be concerned with the issue of male victims of domestic violence? First, there is the obvious harm done by these attacks – from injury to death. Second, there are the costs to society of the harm produced by violence towards men – health care costs, child welfare costs, criminal justice costs, etc. But even more important, female-to-male violence, even if done in self defense, is not an effective way of mitigating violence, research indicates that women who use violence report that it tends to lead to more not less, violence by their partners (*Gelles & Straus, 1988*).

REFERENCES

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If you or someone you know is experiencing a family violence emergency, call 911 or contact your local police.