

St. Neots Abuse Project

Tel: 01480 396500

Fax: 01480 356342

Web: www.snapdomesticviolence.org.uk



*P.O. Box 57
St. Neots
Cambs
PE19 1AA*

Modern Urban Myths - Domestic Violence Some Questions Answered By Robert J. Whiston

WHAT CAN I DO IF I AM IN A VIOLENT RELATIONSHIP?

SNAP (St Neots Abuse Project) runs a help-line for ALL victims of domestic abuse.

No matter how trivial you think the abuse might be we are here to help you.

Telephone SNAP and speak confidentially to one of our experienced and friendly help-line advisors.

**Help-line:
01480 396500**

Lines are open between 11.00am and 11.00pm every day.

Occasionally you may get the answer-phone but if you leave a message we will get back to you as soon as possible. Alternatively, you can send a Fax.

WHAT SERVICE CAN SNAP OFFER?

- 1 Someone to talk and confide with.
- 2 Friendly and constructive advice.
- 3 Complete confidentiality.
- 4 Understanding Advisors.

WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

Domestic violence is the physical, emotional/mental, sexual or financial abuse of one person on another within the context of a close relationship which includes partners, ex-partners and family members. It affects people from all walks of life regardless of gender, race, class or sexual orientation.

Physical abuse can include slapping, beating, kicking and physical injuries, scarring or even death.

Sexual abuse means being forced to have sex against your will, being forced to have sex with other people or in ways that hurt you.

But that is not all, constant criticism and being told that you are useless, ugly or worthless can be abuse too. So is threats to kill you (or harm you – or the children), bullying, being locked in, not being allowed to see your friends or family, and not letting you eat or sleep. These are all unacceptable.

It is very much harder for men to report their abuse because they are often not believed. They are derided, and feel humiliated and ashamed. Many men put up with their abuse because they do not wish to lose contact with their children.

Domestic Violence does not mean just physically assaulting another human being.



1. Very few men are victims of domestic violence

Not true – From the graph below, using Home Office figures, it is evident that there are over 100,000 men who are beaten up so badly by their partners that their complaints to the police have to be logged.

Fig 4. Incidents of domestic violence 1996 – 2001, Home Office (see Table 1 below).

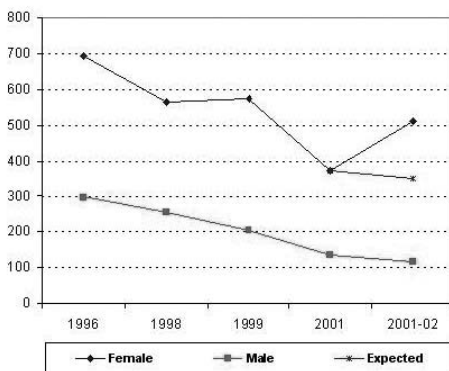


Table 1. New figures from 'M' of the Home Office (Oct 2002)

Trend in estimated number of incidents of domestic violence in thousands				
Year	Total	Male incidents	Female incidents	% male incidents
1996 BCS (crime in 1995)	967	296	694	30
1998 BCS (crime in 1997)	812	253	564	31
2000 BCS (crime in 1999)	771	203	575	26
2001 BCS (crime in 2000)	503	134	374	27
2001/2 BCS interviews	621	117	511	19

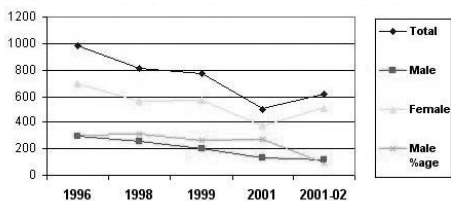
July 2002, exchanges with HO: The sudden fall to 19% for male victims (Table 1 above) seems questionable. It seems odd that historically male victims were between 27% and 30% prior to our making enquiries. Originally the figures we provided to the HO (taken incidentally from the BCS and pub'd by the HO) showed a fall for women victims for the year 2001/02. The statistical directorate seemed unaware they had these figures. After informing them of their own findings the HO statistical directorate returned our figures with "up-rated" sub-totals showing more, not less, women were victims in that year. The figures for women they said had been 'retrospectively adjusted' and the result 're-weighted' following the 2001 Census to reflect the new population total indices.

2. It is women who experience domestic violence and it is men who perpetrate such violence

Not true – Look at the graph above which uses Home Office statistics. A recent survey from Canada found women were 5 times more likely to report a DV incident than men. A more representative gauge of the number of DV incidents (both reported and unreported) can be gleaned Home Office Study 191. From a large cross section of the population of England and Wales, this showed that 4.2% of women and 4.2% of men reported they had been physically assaulted by their current or former partner in the last year". When "frightening threats" are included the figures rises only marginally to 4.9% of men and 5.9% of women.

Domestic Violence Table, 1996 – 2001, BCS (British Crime Survey)

Fig 1 New figures from 'A' at the Home Office (as at Oct 2002)



Most crucial aspect:-

Repeat victimisation - 2001 BCS page 53.

Table A2.9 Number of times victims were victimised, 1999 and 2000

Year:	1999			2000		
Times:	1	2	3	1	2	3
Domestic violence [%]	43	26	31	46	31	23

This table is key, e.g. in 1999, 57% of cases (26+31) are repeats. I have been unable to get further clarification because the Home Office themselves say they don't know the basis. The 57% could represent a). the same women reporting the same incident again, ie progress chasing or b). the same woman reporting a separate incident with the same man or c). the same woman reporting a separate incident with different man or d). any other variation. Depending on the analysis it may turn out that of the approximately 500,000 reports only 190,000 are true reports and the remaining 55% are duplicates.

3. Domestic violence is experienced by all women across all social classes

Not true – While instances of domestic violence may be found in all social strata it is predominately found in the lower socio-economic orders. Page viii of HOS 191 states that amongst women, risks of physical assault in 1995 were highest for those who were 16 – 24 year old age group; separated from their spouses; Council tenants; in poor health; and/or in financial difficulties.

4. Men initiate and perpetrate domestic violence

Not true – Studies from around the world indicate that women initiate domestic violence more often than men. The Alberta Study found that women initiated domestic violence in 67% of instances. This finding is echoed in other large studies. Studies showing the contrary, ie that only men initiate domestic violence, are usually found to be small sample numbers and/or based on the responses of women in refuges.

5. Two women a week die as a result of domestic violence

This is partly true – This is the latest twist in the saga to keep an old story fresh. While 2 women on average die each week we are never told how many men die each week. Annually, twenty five percent of all domestic violence homicide victims are men. In the last few years the number of male victims of homicide has rising from around 700 per year to around 800 per year.

6. Men can't possibly be victims of domestic violence because I would have heard about it ?

Not true – Domestic violence is now big business with millions of pounds of funding at stake. In London alone over £9.3 million is earmarked for refuges and the Chiswick refuge alone has an income of over £3m. As the number of domestic violence victims fall so the definition of domestic violence has had to be widened in recent years in an attempt to reinflate the figures and head off any hint of a funding review.

7. Women's Aid is the leading charity associated with domestic violence. If men were also victims of domestic violence they would have said so

Not true – Women's Aid have known about the problem for years. In 1992 Sandra Horley, the director of the Chiswick Family Refuge, was quoted by Isabel Wolff as saying, "Refuges for women are struggling to survive, and if we put across this idea that the abuse of men is as great as the abuse of women, then it could seriously affect our funding". ('Domestic Violence: the other side', The Spectator, 28 November 1992, p 24).

8. Gov't figures show that '1 in 4' women suffer domestic violence

Not true - This is a classic instance of a "factoid". Factoids are assertions made in the furtherance of propaganda and / or an ideological viewpoint and presented as facts that are, a). wholly untrue b). are partially true in that they omit crucial evidence, c). contain only a grain of truth and, d). are generally designed to mislead the reader. This factoid assertion falls into the b), c) and d) categories. What the government survey found was that 1 in 4 women will experience domestic abuse (ie including psychological and not just physical assaults) at some point in their lifetime. We are not told this include "feeling afraid" and verbal abuse. We are not told the length of the "lifetime" or average age; nor the form of domestic violence. Statistically it is meaningless. It is as useful as asserting that 1 in 4 gardeners will injure themselves doing the garden at some time in their lifetime. Domestic violence is now defined as all things, including 'financial' domestic violence and 'glaring looks', and fear thereof. The measure of domestic violence therefore misleads the reader. But crucially, what the report also stated - and which is always omitted - is that by the same measure 1 in 6 men will experience domestic violence. The UK has a female population of 30 million; 23.5million of which are over 18. If '1 in 4' women suffered domestic violence this would result in 5.9 million women have been abused by their male partners. The average women's refuge (there are about 400) would each have to cater for 15,000 victims. The average women's refuge presently caters for less than 100 per annum.

9. Sometimes domestic violence proves fatal

This is true – Every week both men and women loose their lives as a result of domestic violence. Police figures show that around one male and two females die each week. HOS 191 reports that women aged 20 –24 reported the highest levels of domestic violence in the survey; 28% said they had been assaulted by a partner at some time and 34% had been threatened or assaulted (the figures for men are similar). The victim was injured in 47% of incidents women 47% and men 31% 9% of incidents resulted in cuts and 2% in broken bones. Harriet Harman, the governments new Solicitor General, wants to change the law so that women - but not men - accused of murder are tried as if for a lesser offence. She wants to re-instate notions of preferential treatment for females last seen in the Victorian era.

10. Women of all ages experienced domestic violence

Not true – On page 28 of HOS 191, Figure 4.1 “Prevalence of domestic assaults” depicts a reverse logistical curve for incidents of domestic violence decreasing with age. Groupings begin high in the 16-19 group and taper down to 55-59. There is little difference between men and women. Page viii of HOS 191 states that amongst women, risks of physical assault in 1995 were highest for those who were 16 – 24 year old age group. Women aged 20 –24 reported the highest levels of domestic violence in the survey. This is also true for men.

11. Domestic violence is worse among ethnic minorities

Not true – HOS 191, page 29 Summary of Figure 4.2 “ Risk of domestic assault in 1998 by ethnic group”. There is only a half of one percent point differentiating Whites from Blacks, Indians and Pakistanis.

12. Statistics show far more women as victims of domestic violence than men

Not true – See answers above. What is true is that women are far more likely to report instances of domestic violence and cause official figures to reflect this. If we accept that not all women who experience domestic violence will report it, then we must also accept that male victims are even more unlikely to report it. It is estimated that women are 5 times more likely to report domestic violence than men according to a Canadian survey (12/8/02). Some years earlier the Sunday Times (GB) and the Los Angeles Times, independently, estimated that men were about 9 time less likely to report DV incidents. At the moment the rate of reported domestic violence crimes in England and Wales is 5:1 in favour of women. What is not appreciated is that men reporting the same crime to the police frequently do not have their complaints logged. In fact a small survey by Dispatches (Ch 4, 1999) found that 25% of men who reported being attacked by their female partner are arrested and taken into police custody. Homosexual men, seen perhaps as a minority (?), are thought to do slightly better in regard having their complaint logged by police.

13. Every 6 to 20 seconds a woman is abused by the man she lives with

Not true - Few people ever question this claim and therefore few realise it is perhaps another Prof. Betsy Stanko factoid. There are about 23 million women in England & Wales between ages of 16 – 60. At the rate of every 6 seconds the number would be 5.3 million women. At the rate of every 20 seconds 1.5 million women would be victims. Such wide discrepancy is not statistically supportable. Bea Campbell, the radical feminist and lesbian, went further and in an article for the Guardian claimed women victims phoned the police every second of every day. If that were true over 31m cases would be occurring every year – the female population of England & Wales is 23.5 million.

14. All women must be aware of, and live in fear of domestic violence

Not true – The incidence is very low (see above, 4.2%) Only one or two categories are more dangerous than the others and then only marginally, ie the 16-24 and the 'single' person.

15. 'The home' is a violent place for all women. Married and professional women are equally a risk

Not true – HOS 191 found that a married wife (from any socio-economic background) was far safer - with a risk of around 2% (page 29). Compared to households comprised of the less skilled, manual workers and the unemployed, professional women (which included married, unmarried, single and cohabiting women) also reported a low risk of 6% and 3% respectively, (page 30).

16. Domestic violence affects all women irrespective of their marital status

Not true – Unmarried women are far more likely to experience domestic violence than any other category, ie married women and widows. HOS 191 found that the lowest 'at risk' group was married women at 2%. This figure is also found in Canadian family statistics. Overall, the figures would suggest there is little merit in constant monitoring large segments of the population. What may confuse the general public is the propensity for official figures to include in their definition of 'wives' not only spouses but common law wives and long term cohabitantes. When the figures are desegregated married women are far safer from domestic violence. If any women should feel threatened by the possibility of domestic violence then marriage and a home is the best protection.

17. Domestic violence is very common. Figures for are not declining - it is a growing menace

Not true – The latest Home Office figures for domestic violence show a fall in numbers. In fact, there has been a 30% fall in the last 2 years and over the last 7 years the numbers of reported domestic violence cases has fallen year on year (see Fig 1). In fact, levels of domestic violence are now at levels last seen in the 1980's.

Rise and fall in reports of DV and in the Indexed Crime. (BCS)

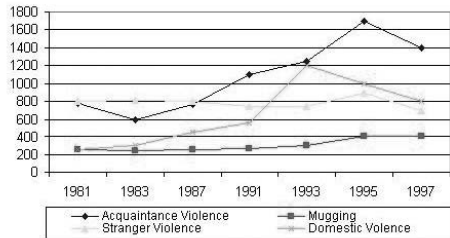
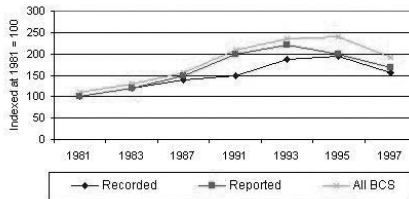


Fig 2. Trends in BCS violence typology 1981 – 1997 (BCS 1998, Figure 3.10, page 15).

Fig 3. "Indexed" trends in comparable crime 1981 – 1997 (BCS 1998, p23, Fig 4.5)



18. Men who are violent towards their wives are also violent to their children

This is almost true – A link is thought to exist between the two but its nature has yet to be determined. This is another ‘factoid’ premised on the assumption that all men are inherently violent and are therefore unable to differentiate between hitting a partner who may be arguing with them and hitting a child who may also be arguing with them. However, this case is rarely pushed further in part because mothers are prosecuted far more often for child abuse than are men or fathers. World wide between 65% and 85% of all child abuse and neglect cases stem from mothers, usually single or unmarried mothers. A child’s mortality and morbidity prospects dramatically deteriorate where there is no father in the household, indicating that a child’s survival is dependent on a father presence. If there is a link to be found then this would tie women who initiate domestic violence in 60% of cases to initiating violence towards their children. It is also now accepted that women perpetrate approximately 35% of all child sexual abuse and that the majority of the remaining amount is not perpetrated by men and fathers but siblings and other family members (see NSPCC report Nov 2000).

19. Alternative lifestyles do not increase the incidence of domestic violence

Not true - See answers above. HOS 191, on page 11, makes it plain that the increased number of “partners” that young women now tend to have significantly increases their chances of becoming a victim of DV. Interestingly, the inherently femcentric nature of HOS 191 is again revealed at this point. There is no comparable quotation or measurement for the dangers young men have to face by having a series of female partners. Over 60% of children given into ‘care’ are from single mother, ie non-traditional, households.

20. Over 50% of all divorces involve domestic violence; the Assoc. of Chief Officers of Probation (ACOP) state that as a fact

Not true – Sadly the Association of Chief Officers of Probation are only trying to make a political point to Gov’t. They have got it wrong. Their statement of fact was reproduced in evidence to the Children Act Sub-Committees (CASC) and was rejected by them when it was found to be inaccurate. But in the true tradition of a factoid’s life, this will not stop it being used in the future. The more accurate picture from CADFCASS is this: only acrimonious and intractable cases involve allegations of domestic violence; this type of case makes up around 25% of all divorce cases; of these about 25% are found to be substantiated to any degree; most are technically domestic violence (25% x 25% = 5% proven). Therefore very few, less than 1% of cases, can be considered to be domestic violence in nature and to pose a danger to child and mother.

21. NAPO, a civil servant trade union, in a recent survey found that children in 61% of divorce cases were in danger from domestic violence

Not true – Sadly NAPO share the same political ambitions as the Association of Chief Officers of Probation (ACOP). This assertion, and other factoids were made in the Observer (Dec 2002) and in the Guardian (Feb 2003) was based on a survey NAPO had conducted. In response to this the Lord Chancellors Dept (LCD) wrote:- "We were also concerned that the article could be misinterpreted - as all in the field are aware there is a tendency for a figure to suddenly hit the headlines and remain there. In the case of the NAPO survey it was the 61%. This figure (obtained from a survey of 300 cases) relates to contact cases where there are allegations of domestic violence by men (I recall the figure for findings was 21%). .. It is important to get matters in perspective. Ms Winterton [the then minister] has also updated Harry Fletcher [Gen. Secretary of NAPO] on the work of the various PSA-8 groups."

22. Most men who claim to be victims of domestic violence are really the perpetrators and are only trying to hide their own aggression by claiming victim status

Not true – This is one of the newest factoids. The assertion was at one time to be found on the BBC's "Hitting Home" website (it has since been removed). It was based on a rather dubious report paid for by the Scottish Assembly and undertaken by Gadd of Keele University. His report was based on a small sample of between 30 and 50 men.

23. Domestic violence should be taken more seriously when women are the victims

Not true – Why, in an egalitarian society should domestic violence against one sex be viewed more seriously than if it were against the opposite sex ? Should we view domestic violence against lesbians as more serious than against homosexuals ? This is the age old question posed in Shakespeare Merchant of Venice, "If you prick us, do we not bleed ?"

24. Domestic violence is linked to child deaths. Over the last 14 years many children have been killed when visiting their violent fathers on contact visits

"Not True - This was first raised by Women's Aid in the PSA-8 committee (Oct 2002). LCD staff found that only 3 families where deaths over that period could be linked to contact visits. A figure dwarfed by the number of children killed every year by their "resident" mother." This what the Lord Chancellors Dept wrote about the matter, " On the NAPO items Rosie Winterton [junior minister] has met with Harry Fletcher as we had concerns about the general flavour of the article. First, it inaccurately gave the impression that 19 children since 1994 have been killed by their fathers through court arranged 'visiting access' i.e. contact. As you are aware the LCD has investigated the cases of 14 children featured in the WAFE campaign and we have shared that outcome with WAFE and the Safety Group (the figure of 19 arises from the 15 in the WAFE campaign which included one mother plus four children killed by their father last summer). Ms Winterton also wished that NAPO were brought up to date with the fact that we had investigated these tragic deaths."

25. Domestic violence is a pattern of controlling and aggressive behaviour from one adult, usually a man, towards another, usually a woman, within the context of an intimate relationship

This is partially true – Domestic violence can be a pattern of controlling and aggressive behaviour from one adult to another but does it need to be from a man to a woman? Arrests for domestic violence often result from a man hitting out and the woman calling the police. One has to ask what provokes him to lash out in the first place? Is it a constant verbal barrage from his partner? If so, isn't that the controlling and aggressive behaviour? Doesn't intimidation and degradation come within the Home Office's new and wider definition of domestic violence ?

26. Women are victims of domestic violence because the violence towards them is an expression of inherent male aggression

Not true – If domestic violence were an expression of inherent male aggression why is domestic violence between lesbians and homosexuals so much greater than between heterosexuals ?

27. Domestic violence is all about male power. Male oppression is sponsored by 'Patriarchy' within our society

Not true - Society has never been so un-patriarchal as it is now. Some would argue it more resembles a matriarchy. If that is the case and the problem of domestic violence is growing then we need to rethink our assumptions over causes. It is being suggested nowadays that rather than 'power' it is actually powerlessness that triggers domestic violence, e.g. the Kosovan experience. More recent research evidence suggests domestic violence is more likely to result from a state of mind linked to personality disorders, known as "Comorbidity" (ref. Ms. Terrie Moffitt). Therefore, if this is the case - and it is not comparable to Munchausen Syndrome - it will be applicable in equal measure to both sexes

28. Contact visits are dangerous for children. Courts routinely order 'contact' even though they are aware of the father's violent tendencies

Not true – It is agreed by everyone concerned that, except for very exceptional circumstances, 'contact visits are beneficial for children. "There are a few dangerous fathers but vetting procedures are in place all through the systems." Solicitors now have to quiz their clients; CAFCASS workers have to make full enquiries; and only then will judges be satisfied and order contact. Another dimension often overlooked is that the likelihood of child abuse occurring is far lower where a father is present in a fathers role or has frequent visits/contact with his children.

29. Domestic violence results from an 'imbalance' in economic power between men and women.

Not true – Historically, men have always earned more than women have. This did not make them more or less violent towards women. The last 40 years has been an era where men and women not only earn equal pay but where women are encouraged and welcomed into the workforce. Domestic violence perpetrated by both sexes has always existed. Why should it increase when women become more economically independent?

30. Domestic violence is most serious when a woman and children are the victims.

This is almost true – No one would doubt the sentiment but we live in an age of equality and we should view domestic violence as equally serious for men as we view it when women are victims.

31. Domestic violence is always perpetrated by men

Not true – As research into domestic violence has gathered pace it has become clear that, as in homosexuality or feminism, there are various types and subdivisions. One of the more bizarre is "Consensual" domestic violence. A very common type is "mutual" domestic violence. Domestic violence is often perceived as flowing from the perpetrator to the victim. The truth is that the most common form is where both parties engage in domestic violence. This common type is termed "mutual" domestic violence. A need to codify and make comparisons between surveys meaningful has led to the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS). This has been criticised in the past but improvements have since been made. CTS lists and quantifies actions such as, slapping, shoving, biting, scratching, wounding, punching, throwing things, knifing, shooting and poisoning.

32. Men who assault their wives also beat up their children.

This is almost true – This statement represents a widely held view of domestic violence. It is a view exploited by the NSPCC in their fund raising promotions. However, it represents only a 'gender' view of violence; one where it is predominantly men who batter their wives and as a consequence are more likely to assault their children. It looks somewhat dated by today's standards. It is based on writings by such people as Stark & Flitcraft, (1988), 'The battering of women who are mothers usually predates the infliction of child abuse'; and Pagelow (1989), 'At least half of all battering husbands also batter their children'; and Bowker, Arbitell, and McFerron, 1988) who wrote, 'The more severe the abuse of the mother, the worse the child abuse.' While these research studies from the 1980's may still be valid, they looked only at men as perpetrators. If the linkage between partner and child abuse is true then we should expect violence by mothers and women (who commit over 60 % of all child abuse) not only to deeply affect children but reflect the level of assaults against men.

33. Many women don't report incidents of domestic violence. It is far more prevalent than the reported figures to the police would suggest

This is almost true – While it is true that some women do not report domestic violence it is almost always overlooked that far more men are reluctant to report being a victims of domestic violence. Figures from around the world show that women are between 5 and 9 times more likely to report an incident of domestic violence than men, ie men are 5 - 9 times less likely

34. Men don't need refuges because they can look after themselves - they are simply not needed

Not true - The usual scenario is that the man is forced or legally obliged to move out of his own home. The authorities see his removal as easier and less painful than removing the women / mother. The courses of action then open to him are minimal. If he were a woman he would qualify for many more options available from charitable and local authority sources. Basically, his options are; the park bench, a friend's house, the Salvation Army or bed and breakfast. And because he will probably be in employment some of those options may be difficult to obtain. Presently refuges for men are to be found in Sweden, America, Spain, Ireland and Canada.

35. Refuges for men have been tried before and have failed for lack of clients

This is almost true - One man, frustrated by the inertia of institutions and local authorities, allegedly opened a refuge for battered men because no support services or funding was available. It duly received widespread press coverage - as it was intended to do. However, the local council took exception to his opening his own home and fitting it out with several bunk beds and ordered it closed down the following week.

36. Domestic violence sets up an accepted pattern of behaviour that re-emerges in the next generation's life.

This is almost true - The jury is still out on this issue and so the verdict has yet to be decided. What is clear is that some reports state that there is a correlation and that it is significant. However, other reports say there is a marginal correlation but it is not significant and not an unavoidable predetermining factor. The latter assertion may prove to be more accurate. Adults who have witnessed DV as children are likely to seek to avoid it in their relationships. Equally, an argument can be made out that socio-economic factors and/or IQ levels can give rise to its repetitions as a norm in the next generation.

37. Not enough money is spent on domestic violence initiatives

Not true – Apart from the £250m of funding earmarked in 1998 for the Crime Reduction Programme to lower domestic violence against women, the Gov't released another document in June 1999 entitled "Living without Fear". This document together with "Breaking the Chain" outlined a further £6 million, plus £6.3million, and a further £14m of government and near-gov't money. These sums were to be made available for schemes to combat violence against women. There was no mention of funding for male victims. Enquires at the Home Office revealed that they were unable to allocate any funds for men because in 1998 their remit was only to consider female victims. In April 1999 Miss. Jeshran of the Criminal Policy Strategy Unit at the Home Office assured mens and fathers that "Breaking the Chain" was an "... example of measures that are gender neutral and designed to be helpful to both men and women."

“ I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes ? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions ? hurt with the same weapons, If you prick us, do we not bleed? if you poison us, do we not die? and if you wrong us, shall we not revenge ?”

- The Merchant of Venice. Act 3, Scene 1.

DV down 59% since 1995 - Home Office Statistical Bulletin July 2005 page 83
<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs05/hosb1105.pdf>

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UK Fathers advocate on behalf of parents who are seeking to maintain a meaningful and responsible relationship with their children after family break down or divorce.

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