

**REVIEW OF RESEARCH REPORT TO
THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND CHILDREN, IRELAND**

**Men and domestic violence; what research tells us
By Kieran McKeown and Philippa Kidd, March 2002**

- This report on domestic violence against male victims is unacceptable as a serious scientific critique.
- The methodology used is inappropriate for this type of exercise, with the result that no valid conclusions can be derived about male victims of domestic violence.
- There is no evidence that the authors conducted a systematic review of the literature which is what would have been expected for an exercise such as this.
- The bibliography quoted is both partial and highly selective. Many key pieces of work have been omitted, other lesser pieces of research (often unpublished, or referenced simply as conference proceedings) are given a weight and credibility they do not deserve. The referencing is sloppy with two separate systems apparently used and many references contained in the bibliography that are not referred to in the text.

- The authors draw inferences and conclusions at the end of each chapter and at the end of the report which cannot be justified by the evidence presented in the report.
- There are many criticisms which could be levied in relation to the authors rationale for selecting the studies on which they base their conclusions. Many of the papers relied on, although influential at the time, were written between ten and twenty years ago and would now be regarded as historic by experts working in this area.
- It is unclear why the particular thirteen studies the authors chose were selected whilst others were not. It is also not clear from a scientific perspective, why they decided to examine only studies that included male and female victims in the same study. It is also not appropriate to attempt to examine psycho-social, cultural, health or economic factors associated with domestic violence from studies that were principally epidemiological and looking at prevalence of domestic violence, but were never designed to address these questions in the first place. Unfortunately the approach taken by the authors suggest an apparent lack of familiarity with the subject of domestic violence and a lack of critical analysis and awareness of the social context within which in domestic violence occurs. It is only through being aware of this context that it is possible to interpret the studies that have been carried out and understand the methodological difficulties associated with the subject.

- Certain topics are discussed in a simplistic and cursory manner e.g. perpetrators of domestic violence, family background of perpetrators and victims; other key issues are omitted altogether, e.g. domestic violence in same sex (male-male) relationships, or domestic homicide, which is often the end point of a relationship in which there have been allegations of battering.
- Although the authors do not rely on criminal statistics at all, it is noteworthy in this respect that in 1999 according to the criminal statistics for England and Wales 37% of women homicide victims were killed by a present or former partner, compared to 6% of male victims.
- Another important piece of research (not referenced in this report) was carried out by Professor Betsy Stanko in London. Professor Stanko is a very distinguished researcher in this area and is the former director of the ESRC Violence Research Programme. She and colleagues conducted a 'one day snapshot survey' of domestic violence cases which were reported to the police, Relate and accident and emergency departments. They found that the number of male victims of domestic violence who presented across all these services was so small as to be almost insignificant, compared to the number of women victims. This led them to conclude that, in terms of prevalence and service provision, the issue of domestic violence towards men, although not to be dismissed entirely, was insufficient to warrant any serious allocation of resources for domestic violence victims.
- Although the authors refer to a figure of 6,000 male victims of domestic violence contacting AMEN over a three year period, they have made no attempt to place this figure in the context of women

who seek refuge from violent partners every year. It should be noted in this context that The Women's Aid Federation of England published figures that show that in 2001 they received 35,000 calls during the year from women experiencing domestic violence and seeking to escape violent partners.

- The report reads as if the authors have not set out from an objectively neutral stand-point. The overall impression one gains is that the authors decided what they were going to find and then selected those studies which supported their hypothesis, whilst ignoring other studies which did not.
- The authors appear to place considerable reliance on studies of work that was carried out in the 1980s and early '90s. Since then, attitudes, awareness of the social context and understanding of the issues surrounding domestic violence have moved on enormously. It is not appropriate to use such historic data to answer the sort of questions the authors are attempting to do, without placing this firmly within the social context operating at the time. The studies selected by the authors for analysis have their own disadvantages which have been extensively reviewed within literature most of which is apparently not known to the authors. Essentially these suggest that large-scale anonymous and epidemiological studies, such as the ones chosen by the authors, often result in greater reluctance to disclose experiences of a personal nature such as physical or sexual assault. Thus, only including these studies may contain inherent methodological weaknesses, which the authors don't appear to have understood fully.

- The authors appear to have minimised and downplayed the large body of literature criticising the Conflict Tactics Scale, which is the main instrument used in the surveys analysed. One of the key criticisms is that the CTS does not contain any scale for measuring sexual violence. Sexual abuse and sexual degradation in various forms are often a feature of domestic violence, and is inflicted substantially more often by men on women, than the other way around. The conflict tactic scale also does not ask about injuries sustained and it includes a number of items such as crying or sulking as 'psychological abuse' that many more recent scales would be reluctant to consider as domestic violence, unless they were associated with sexual or physical assault. The authors do not appear to have examined any other instrument that could be used for assessing domestic violence although there are number of them.
- There is no attempt at any statistical analysis within the document and no evidence the authors have consulted a statistician in terms of analysing and interpreting the data.
- Although the authors point out that this is not an exhaustive survey, they nevertheless arrive at conclusions that appear to be sweeping and wide-ranging. Their final conclusion that the majority of domestic violence is, not only perpetrated by women, but is a manifestation of mutual combat, is therefore is misleading, unsubstantiated by the evidence presented and , given the highly sensitive nature of this subject, is potentially dangerous in that conclusions are sometimes are read without an understanding of how those conclusions are arrived at and what reliance should be placed on them.

