

“Things got a whole lot worse after the break up”: How men’s experiences of abuse can continue post-separation

Dr Liz Bates

University of Cumbria

(Elizabeth.Bates@cumbria.ac.uk)

Credit also to Dr Julie Taylor at UoC
and Dr Ben Hine at UWL

Aim of this Session

- Briefly discuss what we know about men's experiences of intimate partner violence
- Consider how these experiences can continue or change after the end of the relationship
- Discuss the implications of these findings for current policy and practice in the UK

Historic work and narrative

- Feminist movement in the 1970s brought about an awareness of domestic violence
- Focus stopping wife abuse and marital rape
- Development of Gendered models (e.g., Dobash & Dobash, 1979)
- Influential within research, policy and practice
- Duluth Model (Pence & Paymar, 1993)

Male Victims

- Research developed over the last 50 years
- Development of act based measures (e.g., CTS)
- Experiences of physical abuse (e.g., Hines et al., 2007)
 - Use of weapons, attacked when vulnerable
- Experiences of sexual abuse (Weare & Bates, 2020)
- Experiences of psychological/emotional abuse (e.g., Bates, 2020)
- Legal and administrative aggression (Tilbrook et al., 2020)
- Impact of the abuse (e.g., Bates, 2019; Hines & Douglas, 2011)
 - Physical and mental health
- Practitioner's experiences and perspectives (Hine, Bates & Wallace, 2020)

Post-Separation Abuse

- Evidence of continued abuse and harassment of women (e.g., Jaffe, et al., 2003).
- Custody dispute and divorce
- Parental Alienation (syndrome)
- Impact on children (e.g., Callaghan et al., 2015) and children's voice

Post-Separation Abuse

- Social Survey data revealed that of those who had identified they had experienced IPV in their relationship, 40% of women and 32% of men reported that some violence occurred after the end of the relationship (see Hotton, 2001).
 - For 24% of those reporting this post-separation experience, the violence had escalated and for 39% the violence had only begun after the end of the relationship.
- Domestic stalking by a partner/ ex-partner was 0.6% (111,000) men and 1.7% of women (279,000) - for every 4 victims of stalking, three will be female and one male (ONS, 2019)
- For male victims of stalking, 32% of the perpetrators have been current or ex partners (since the age of 16). For women 45% of the perpetrators have been current or ex partners (ONS, 2019)
- Bates (2019) N=13 interview study

Post-Separation Abuse

(Bates, Taylor, Hope & Smith,
2021)

$N = 130$

Post-Separation Physical Violence and Control

- “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)

Impact

- “I tried to kill myself twice.” (Participant 9)
- “I worry about picking up my phone. Worried it’s her.” (Participant 111)
- “...generally okay. However, the pain of not seeing my children is unbearable” (Participant 4)

- “I miss both my step kids deeply.” (Participant 116)
- “My family have gone through a lot of pain and are also victims of the alienation (cousins, uncles, grandparents, friends).” (Participant 36)

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
- Ultimately is a way in which men can continue to be controlled through their children

Manipulation of the parental relationship (Bates & Hine, 2021)

- “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 work 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.”

Barriers to Help-seeking

- “I wanted to talk, but it was almost impossible to find someone who would just listen and most importantly, believe me” (Participant 106 in Bates et al., 2020)

Implications for Policy and Practice

- "...there is a need for policies and legislation that are inclusive in both "name and spirit." (Bates & Douglas, 2020 – Review of UK and US Services)

Thank you for listening!

- Any questions?
- Elizabeth.Bates@cumbria.ac.uk
- @DrLizBates

