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Female Perpetrated Domestic Abuse: A Study Exploring the Hidden Experiences of Male Victims through a Thematic Analysis of Online Blogs

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**FEMALE PERPETRATED
DOMESTIC ABUSE:
A STUDY EXPLORING THE HIDDEN
EXPERIENCES OF MALE VICTIMS
THROUGH A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF
ONLINE BLOGS**

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Abstract:

Despite a great deal of academic literature surrounding domestic abuse in general, it is fair to suggest that the majority of research focuses on male perpetrated domestic abuse and the female victim. This therefore neglects the complexity of domestic abuse as a crime, whilst also undermining and causing further implications for the unrecognised and under researched male victim. Considering how much extensive research has been undertaken to explore female victim experiences of domestic abuse, this study sets out to explore the 'hidden' male victim. It will be evidenced through the collection and thematic analysis of eight online male victim blogs, that although little research exists on this area of domestic abuse, the stigmatisation, subjection of abuse, damaging effects and further complications caused by the abuse are just as prominent, if not more prominent and destructive for male victims of domestic abuse than their female counterpart.

Keywords: Abuse, Domestic Abuse, Female Perpetrated, Male Victims, Violence.

Introduction

It is estimated by the British Crime Survey for England and Wales that over two million adults became victims of some form of domestic abuse in 2011 and 2012 (Dar, 2013). It has also been estimated that on average, the police receive an emergency call in relation to domestic abuse every 30 seconds (HMIC, 2014). Domestic abuse is a very complex topic of research and debate that is rapidly expanding as it becomes more recognised as a 'real' crime. In the late 1970s/1980s legal definitions of domestic abuse focused on physical male perpetrated violence. Domestic abuse was advocated as directly physical violence, as at the time, non-physical acts had not been thought of as domestic abuse. Due to domestic abuse being relatively new regarding the concept of it being criminal, the notion of it solely being physical

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was put forward so it would fall under the 'real' crime category that is addressed by law (Goodmark, 2012, pp. 30-31). Defining domestic abuse is highly problematic with various definitions and social ideologies that mask its complexity. Regarding the original and continuing feminist standpoint surrounding domestic abuse, Hooks (2000) states that domestic abuse is male perpetrated abuse against women. The official definition for domestic abuse is from the Home Office (2013) and states:

Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to psychological, physical, emotional, sexual and financial abuse (Home Office, 2013).

This piece of research sets out not to explore the standard and more socially accepted female victim of domestic abuse, but sets out to explore the 'hidden' male victim, looking at their personal victim experiences of abuse in order to further explore and identify this hidden and highly stigmatised area of crime.

1 Literature Review

The history of domestic abuse and the attached stigma

Domestic abuse, although recognised previously, is still a fairly new concept in modern society as is evident with the wide range of definitions previously discussed. Research into what was known as 'family violence' began in the 1960s and became more significant around the 1970s. This type of violence was socially seen to be very unusual and something that only occurred under great family disorganisation (Summers & Hoffman, 2002). In a patriarchal society, it has been seen to be normal and tolerable behaviour that women are the subservient family members and men are dominant and in control. Therefore violent actions and behaviours are just another way of keeping the family in line (Kenney, 2011).

During the 1970s research started to become more prevalent in the field of family violence/domestic abuse when the Second Wave of feminism occurred. It has been suggested that the arguments surrounding domestic abuse caused a split in feminism (Abrar, Lovenduski and Margetts, 2000). British feminism was divided into two broad wings, one being the social feminists who believed that male violence against women was a result of capitalist social structures and then there were the radical feminists who stated that it was normal and in men's nature and DNA to mistreat women (Abrar, Lovenduski and Margetts, 2000).

Certain movements like the Women's Liberation Movement in the 1970s drew attention to battered wives as a serious issue. In the 1970s Women's Aid refuges and the Rape Crisis movement were founded due to the Women's Liberation Movement expressing the issue

that women who were currently suffering from abuse and violence in an intimate relationship had no options for help and their protection was being overlooked (Harne & Radford, 2008). The women's movement first began addressing crimes of this nature that had previously been 'invisible'. The initial response from the House of Commons Select Committee included a statement saying that domestic violence should not and would not be treated as a crime (Summers and Hoffman, 2002). In the 1970s, victims of domestic abuse had little recourse to law/justice and in the unlikely situation that the police and criminal justice system did act upon charges of abuse; the offender would be arrested under a general criminal law of assault or battery (Goodmark, 2012).

This beginning point for domestic abuse created a typology and social construction that victims of domestic abuse are solely female (Tsui, 2014) and therefore there is an 'ideal victim'. Ideal victims of crimes are said to be weak, innocent, and flawless characters that are empowered by someone much physically stronger than them (Strobl, 2010; Tsui, 2014). This, therefore, means that whilst female victims of domestic abuse already struggle to gain victim status, the stigma surrounding domestic abuse means that male victims struggle even more (Tsui, 2014).

Female perpetrated abuse

This literature review will now move on to investigate the causes of female perpetrated abuse and how female perpetrators execute their abuse. Munjal (2012) suggests that domestic violence can occur in relationships due to an undercurrent of power and control which runs underneath the relationship between intimate partners. Hooks (2000) addresses patriarchal violence and abuse in the home suggesting that there is a belief that it is acceptable for the more dominant individual in the home to control others; this may be a male or female and therefore is not restricted to the power of one gender.

Research undertaken by Hamberger (2008), Dutton and Nicholls (2005), Grady (2002) and Towson and Zanna (1982) as cited in White and Kowalski (1994) reject the stigma that only males can be perpetrators, with findings that evidently show that domestic abuse from both sexes is equally consistent. Buttell and Carney (2014) have similar findings stating that the abuse of female perpetrators is similar to their male counterparts taking various forms including emotional abuse, physical abuse and threatening behaviour towards the victim.

When focusing on why women abuse, in addition to what Munjal (2012) and Hooks (2000) put forward, Dawes (2004) states that many women that had been abused at a younger age felt justified in trying to take control by exhorting power through abuse. When speaking to

two female abusers, they told Dawes (2004) that the reason they decided to act in an abusive manner and felt justified in doing so was linked to their past relationships and exposure to domestic abuse at an early age. Follingstad et al (1991) had similar findings suggesting that female perpetrators use physical force against their partners so that they could express their anger and regain control.

There is a lot of controversy surrounding the argument that women commit domestic abuse against men. Towson and Zanna (1982) as cited in White and Kowalski (1994) found that research indicated that women were just as likely as men to become aggressive in situations that are congruent with the gender roles that they play. When research began on female perpetrated abuse, it was apparent that there were mixed viewpoints on the subject. This again links back to traditional beliefs and myths surrounding patriarchy and the 'ideal victim' status that women are too weak and passive to commit violent attacks on their intimate partners (White and Kowalski, 1994; Strobl, 2010). An extensive issue that surrounds domestic abuse is that female perpetrated violence has always received less attention, despite evidence that rates of violence are fairly consistent across both genders (Hamberger 2008; Dutton and Nicholls, 2005; Grady, 2002; Towson and Zanna 1982 as cited in White and Kowalski 1994).

With relation to female perpetrated violence and the extent of physical violence used, between 1976 and 1977, over 20,650 men became victims of domestic homicide by an intimate partner (Flowers, 2000). This links with findings from another study that suggested that more than half of all convicted women in a prison had been convicted for domestic homicide (Flowers, 2000). Davis (1998:28) states that 'domestic violence is often an irrational act of rage and passion that can produce murder-suicides'.

Having stated this, a large proportion of the literature suggests that female perpetrated abuse is an irrational act of rage as stated by Davis (1998), and is often excused as self-defence. In a study undertaken by Muelleman and Burgess (1998), findings suggest that male victims who had suffered injuries had high rates of domestic abuse perpetration, strengthening women's use of self-defence as a justification. Grady (2002), Swan and Snow (2006) raise the issue that many, particularly feminists, use the concept of self-defence as an excuse or validation for female perpetrated violence.

Henning, Jones and Holdford, (2005), Hamberger (2008) and Grady (2002) all argue that even when it is accepted that the woman has been violent, arguments such as self-defence are often used as a lie and an excuse, in order to suggest that the female perpetrator is

actually the victim. This can lead to extensive implications for the male victim, as the female perpetrators violent outbursts are simply excused and coined as victim actions of trying to self-protect meaning they are 'let off the hook'. This again strengthens the current societal stigma that only males perpetrate domestic abuse.

The effects of domestic abuse on male victims

This literature review will now review the invisible and damaging effects male victims of domestic abuse experience. Desmarias, Gibas and Nicholls (2010) state that domestic abuse does not only have immediate effects for the victim, but also a continued negative impact once the abuse has stopped. Finley (2013) explains that male victims suffer very similar, almost identical effects as female victims of domestic abuse including physical, psychological, sexual, financial and spiritual abuse, each type having very different effects on victims (Desmarias, Gibas and Nicholls, 2010; Home Office, 2013).

Dobash and Dobash (2004) as cited in Wykes and Welsh (2009) conducted 190 interviews with 95 couples about their feelings on the violence that each partner had used against the other in a year. The research found that 79% of women felt frightened and 65% felt abused and alone. The findings from the male victims were immensely different with research stating that 26% were not bothered by the violence and 3% were impressed. It was reported by this research that only 6% reported feeling victimised by the violent encounters (Dobash and Dobash, 2004 as cited in Wykes and Welsh, 2009).

When analysing findings from male victims, it should be taken into consideration that male victims of domestic abuse may avoid the truth when reporting as it is not masculine to be frightened or to be a victim, particularly of this type of crime as it leaves men feeling powerless and weak. Research strengthening this point suggests that male victims of domestic abuse feel ashamed, weak and embarrassed and therefore will not admit what has happened to them or will be in denial (Finley, 2013; Hogan et al, 2012). This ultimately leads to isolation and loneliness which is already problematic as an effect of domestic abuse due to the perpetrator stopping the victim speaking to friends, family and the outer world (Jackson, 2007).

Other isolating effects from domestic abuse, more commonly among male victims, is the issue of losing contact with their children following the abusive relationship. Research undertaken by Hines and Douglas (2010) and findings from Tsui (2014) suggested that many men had stayed and had more prolonged abuse in the fear that they would lose their

children, the fear that the female perpetrator would gain full custody and the fear for their child's welfare.

A final effect highlighted in the literature was job loss. Swanberg, Logan and Macke (2006), when reporting findings from a study, suggested that 91% of victims had left or lost their job in the last year as a direct result of violence within the home. It is noted that workplace disruption is very common in a domestic abuse relationship which has long-term consequences for the victim often resulting in job loss and lack of financial security (Swanberg, Logan and Macke, 2006). Organisations such as Men's Advice Line (2014) also suggest similar stating that many men lose their job or decide to drop out of work due to the on-going abuse at home.

Under-reporting and the implications

It is important to acknowledge that domestic abuse overall is a highly underreported crime for both genders, however for male victims it is more so. This creates complications regarding research on victim experiences and victim satisfaction of public/support services. Wykes and Welsh (2009) state that the first ever surveys dedicated to violence against women were first developed in the mid-1980s by feminist activists and researchers who had a keen interest in this area. These surveys set out to find the extent of the violence and also the different types of abuse that were occurring. One of the most classic and predominant surveys that was dedicated to domestic violence was conducted in North London by Jayne Mooney. The survey tried to investigate what real women defined domestic violence as (Wykes and Welsh, 2009).

Moreover another problem surrounding statistical findings is caused by a previous lack of a statutory definition which leads to difficulties in recording crime and creating valid statistics and data. Due to a lack of reporting, many domestic abuse cases are not included in current statistics and fall into the area of the underreported 'dark' figure of crime (Wilson, 2009). As suggested by Wilson (2009), by male victims of domestic abuse falling into the dark area of crime, this causes implications leading to extra feelings of shame meaning they are even less likely to report. This is a huge issue because as stated by Dar (2013), victims of domestic abuse, from both genders are currently not reporting.

Dar (2013, p.2) states:

Victims of domestic violence are less likely than victims of other forms of violence to report their experiences to the authorities because of beliefs that their abuse is not a matter for police involvement, their experiences too trivial, or from fear of reprisal.

In a study looking at results from the British Crime Survey, it was reported that male victims were even less likely to report abuse than females (Walby and Allen, 2004). A study undertaken by Migliaccio (2001) revealed that one of the main reasons that male victims of domestic abuse do not report is due to the idea that it makes them feel ashamed whilst also damaging their masculine status, as weakness is the stigma attached to being a male victim of domestic abuse (Tsui, 2014). Other findings indicated that male victims often do not report as they have a sense of duty to their family and the fear of losing contact with their children is often a barrier that stops male victims reporting (Hines and Douglas, 2010; Tsui, 2014). It is culturally believed that men are physically superior and therefore should be able to defend themselves especially in private, domestic matters (Finley, 2013; Migliaccio, 2001 as cited in Hogan et al, 2012). Findings also show that a male victim's injury and harm from abuse is more likely to be psychological and therefore not visible leading to more fear of disbelief (Finley, 2013) regarding reporting.

Police/ Criminal Justice Support

This literature will now explore the support that the criminal justice system gives to male victims following reporting. The first ever specialised police domestic abuse unit was created in London in 1987 which led on to the development of more units being set up in Yorkshire, Birmingham and other cities such as Manchester by 1989 (Abrar, Lovenduski and Margetts, 2000).

Davis (1998) states the traditional approach by police towards domestic abuse would be to avoid any interventions and not arrest the offender due to the underlying argument that even if the offender was arrested, the likelihood of them receiving punishment would be scarce.

Looking at findings from Dispatches (1998), the 'Battered Men' survey states that 49% of men never went to the police for help as they thought that the police would be unsympathetic and would not believe them because they were 'men'. Other findings from this study included the fact that when males called the police for help, 25% of them were arrested.

Another finding from the Dispatches Survey (1998) declared that when police officers had to remove one person from a violent household in order to follow legal standards, it was mostly the male, even if they were the obvious victim. This is said to have left male victims feeling unsupported by the police and regarding the survey taken in 1998, 89% of respondents felt that police did not take them seriously. This is complemented by a study undertaken by Tsui (2014) with male victim respondents of domestic abuse indicating that they felt the police were actively unhelpful towards them suggesting that because they were male, the criminal justice system did not effectively support them.

In 2001, a follow up from the previous 1998 Dispatches survey was undertaken. This survey by Dewar Research included 100 male victims of domestic abuse with similar findings, showing no change (George and Yarwood, 2004). Results showed that male victims who had reported their abuse to the police felt discriminated against, with about a fifth being arrested even though they were the clear victim. The research also showed that the use of pro-arrest policies was only used if the victim was female (George and Yarwood, 2004). This research backs findings from Hogan et al (2012) who found that a common after effect of domestic abuse on male victims, was the feeling of being discriminated against by the police, therefore being subjected to secondary victimisation.

In addition to this, the 2001 Dewar Research on male victims showed that male victims had low success in obtaining non-molestation and exclusion orders from the courts whereas women had no difficulty which again highlights active gendered discrimination (George and Yarwood, 2004).

Looking at more recent studies, in 2013, HMIC conducted an inspection into domestic abuse response on all police forces in England and Wales (HMIC, 2014). The data was made up of reviewed files from the 43 Home Office funded forces as well as 70 domestic abuse victims who took part in focus groups, and 500 domestic abuse victims who were surveyed online (HMIC, 2014). The results from this study showed that the response from police officers was poor despite all efforts to improve it (HMIC, 2014). Findings therefore indicated that although police forces in England and Wales show that on paper, domestic abuse response is priority, in practice it is not. Findings from the report highlighted that problems included a lack of leadership/management by senior officers, poor attitude, officers lacking skills/ knowledge and also lack of feedback from victims on police domestic abuse response (HMIC, 2014).

When reviewing the literature surrounding male victims of domestic abuse, it is evident that there is a huge differentiation between the experiences of male and female victims of domestic abuse throughout society and the criminal justice system. There is also a distinct differentiation in the depth of knowledge, research and academic literature surrounding male victims. This study is therefore vital for the contribution of research into the understanding of male victim experiences of domestic abuse, focusing on their viewpoints and victim stories in order to further expand on knowledge and research surrounding these 'hidden' victims of crime in society.

2 Methodology

After reviewing the literature, the main focus of this study was to explore male victim experiences of domestic abuse through a thematic analysis of online blogs in order to establish patterns, themes and trends. The study followed a qualitative desk based research approach otherwise known as the use of secondary data research (Collin, 2010). A desk-based approach was most appropriate due to the nature of the topic being sensitive and the issue of gaining access to male victims which could have been risky and potentially unethical due to the potential risk of secondary harm (Finch and Fafinski, 2012; Ruane, 2005). Protection of harm in any research is highly critical and a fundamental ethical principle (Ruane, 2005) especially when researching those who may have been victims of crime themselves, as this could lead to secondary victimisation (Finch and Fafinski, 2012).

Thematic analysis of victim blog entries was selected as the chosen research method. In order to conduct a thematic analysis of blogs, the researcher needed to gain access to blog entries via the internet. The use of online research has opened up new research environments that move beyond the traditional notions of research, allowing us into the world of cyberspace and online interactions (Gaiser and Schreiner, 2009; Fielding, Lee, and Blank, 2008).

Blogs are a very useful tool for researchers as they are normally a space in which people express their opinions and views on different topics and experiences without fear of judgement, similar to an online diary (Gloor, 2007). Therefore blogs were chosen for this study as they were the nearest data type to interviews for analysis that were more easily accessible. Heffernan (2005) states that a sample should be as representative as possible of the wider population therefore when looking at a sample size, eight contemporary blogs ranging from 2012-2014 from various websites were selected due to the greater depth and detail within these blog entries.

With regards to ethics, although consent was not required, it was critical to acknowledge that the blogs are sensitive victim accounts that have not got specific informed consent for researchers. Russell and Purcell (2009:2) state implications of online research include strong dangers of breaching confidentiality and anonymity due to dismissal of the fact no informed consent has been given. McKee and Porter (2009:9) when discussing ethical considerations for online sources, such as online blogs, state that ‘...postings are “public”, but, clearly, they are not public in the same way as a published article or conference proceeding - and maybe they should not be treated as such’. Therefore a consideration taken in this study was to remove the names and numerically number the blogs for analysis. Names used throughout the blogs were also changed. Anonymity by changing the

individuals' names to codes or pseudonyms is highly important in any research to protect participants (Thomas, 2013).

Analysis was undertaken using NVivo, a QSR international software, which allows the researcher to effectively analyse qualitative data making it easy to assess themes and important focal points (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). Coding the data was the first step of thematic analysis (Willig, 2013) which enabled the researched to draw on the most critical aspects, patterns and themes for further exploration and elaboration.

3 Findings and Analysis

This chapter aims to discuss the key findings drawn out from the thematic analysis. This chapter will discuss the four key thematic areas selected from the data, in a structured order to build logically from the problems surrounding male victims of domestic abuse.

The issue of the attached stigma

A large section of the literature surrounds the ideology that there is a stigma attached to domestic abuse which links with the notion of patriarchy in society. As Kenney (2011) suggested, in a patriarchal society women are subservient to men as males are dominant, in control and therefore domestic abuse was a normal way for the household ruler to keep the family in line. This stigma that only males can abuse (Tsui, 2014) has had massive implications for male victims of domestic abuse as is clear from the findings within this study. It is evident that it influences their own thoughts and beliefs surrounding their abuse and instils fear of being disbelieved and discriminated against which leads onto further issues like underreporting which will be discussed later in this chapter.

No one would believe that a woman was beating up man [sic] would they? Men are stronger – Blog 7

The above quote suggests fear of disbelief from male victims as they are seen as the stronger intimate partner. Therefore, beliefs initiate the idea that they must be the abuser and that domestic abuse is only a female victim based crime (Tsui, 2014). Theory put forward by Hooks (2000) and similarly Kenney (2011) suggested that abuse in the home is normally perpetrated by the more powerful partner however Hooks (2000) identified that this could be male or female and therefore it was not subjected to one gender. Hooks (2000) theory supported findings from the data where male victims argued that women can be strong if not the stronger partner, and therefore can be perpetrators of domestic abuse.

Yes, men can be victims and yes, women can be the abusers. Women are not as weak as the media makes them out to be. I know that from a lifetime of seeing women fight against other women and even other men, whether as a child or an adult- Blog 1

Hooks (2000) theory is backed up by the Home Office (2013) definition of domestic abuse which identifies that it should be '...regardless of gender of sexuality'. However findings from the blogs suggest that the societal beliefs around domestic abuse are still hazy. There is still a strong issue with the myth behind domestic abuse that needs to be addressed as domestic abuse police policy and the implementation surrounding domestic abuse is sufficient however findings from the HMIC (2014) highlight that practice by officers is very poor.

The 'ideal victim'

Linking in with the stigma attached to domestic abuse, findings and previous literature show that male victims still face a second barrier when trying to gain victim status. Strobl (2010) puts forward the notion of the 'ideal victim', stating it is based around several factors including being weak, innocent, flawless as a character and therefore empowered by someone physically stronger. Linking the notion of the 'ideal victim', which as suggested is normally female, along with the feminist standpoint of domestic abuse rising from patriarchal society and being male perpetrated, male victims are facing a double barrier of disbelief and labelling.

Women are taken on face value as being victims- Blog 3

This quote, drawn out from the qualitative data, links in with Strobl's (2010) theory of the 'ideal victim' which male victims fail to assimilate. Therefore, men are not taken seriously as they are not accepted as real victims. Instead, as suggested by Blog 2, they feel they fit the "joke category".

I guess my abuse fell under the "joke" category I suppose. Unfortunately discrimination and utter disbelief are still extremely common reactions to male victims- Blog 2

Findings by Hamberger (2008), Dutton and Nicholls (2005), Grady (2002) and Towson and Zanna (1982) as cited in White and Kowalski (1994) all dismiss the stigma that women cannot commit domestic abuse. As research findings suggest, domestic abuse is fairly consistent across both genders therefore findings from the data analysis are alarming as male victims are still struggling to receive support, regardless of the statistical proof surrounding their victim status.

Female perpetrated domestic abuse

Existing literature has offered vast amounts of research relating to male perpetrated domestic abuse however the existence of literature regarding female perpetrated abuse is scarce in comparison. From comparing and analysing the eight blogs it is evident to note that female perpetrated domestic abuse takes on various forms from physical and emotional

abuse that include threatening, controlling and manipulative behaviour. This complements the research of Buttell and Carney (2014) who states female perpetrated domestic abuse is projected in various forms.

Emotional abuse

One of the most apparent findings regarding the forms of emotional abuse used by females in the blogs was the use of lies and threats in order to obtain control in the relationship.

The more my panic attacks drove me to escape her, the more she needed to control and pursue - Blog 2

The notion of trying to gain control in the relationship coincides with research done by Dawes (2004) who stated that many women felt they needed to exert power and control in the relationship, particularly those who had been abused previously at a younger age. In most of the blogs the female past lives were not elaborated upon. However in Blog 8, the only blog where this was discussed, it is clear that perpetrator had been in previous violent relationships which links back with the literature.

The violence started not long after and I found out that she had been in violent relationships in the past, which she blamed on her ex's- Blog 8

Another strong and recurring theme from the data was the use of lies used by females to exert control.

I discovered over the months that she could lie convincingly with no compunction whatsoever, while retaining eye contact, and that she regarded it as a skill of which she was proud"- Blog 7

Pretending to be the victim rather than the abuser, was one of the most commonly used lies and forms of control used across seven of the eight blogs. Throughout the data it was clear women used their sexuality and the notion of the 'ideal victim' as described previously by Strobl (2010) as a defence.

I was dumbstruck when I realised that the truth had been turned on its head, and my wife, the abuser, was actually playing the role of the abused to the outside world- Blog 7

The police came and arrested her but she told them I was the violent one and that I was going to kidnap our daughter- Blog 5

Although self-defence was not suggested in all of the blogs by male victims, it is a main excuse area that had been accounted in other studies leading to the conclusion that women perpetrators are just trying to protect themselves and therefore are actually just victims themselves (Henning, Jones and Holdford, 2005; Hamberger, 2008; Swan and Snow, 2006).

"She had the mark on her arm, and it looked as if she'd scratched me in defence"- Blog 7

This quotation backs up research by Grady (2000) who raises the issue that excuses such as self-defence are often used by female perpetrators to excuse their violent behaviour, coining the male as the offender. Findings from the blogs however suggest that the males used no violence against their perpetrator in the relationship which questions the literature in this case.

Yes, I had shouted at her; all married couples have spats; I had lost my temper at her endless demands. Yet I'd not harmed her. There had only been one-way violence: towards me - Blog 7

The quotes above disregard the literature and the self-defence excuse whilst also making it clear that the notion of 'self-defence' can be fabricated and used accordingly by the female perpetrators to ensure the "truth had been turned on its head" as highlighted previously by blog 7.

Physical abuse

Moving on from emotional abuse, it seemed very apparent from the findings that the emotional abuse escalated to physical acts in all eight of the blogs.

Becky's behaviour became ever more controlling and manipulative as the months went by- Blog 6

The next stage of escalation was therefore physical abuse. In several of the blogs the physical abuse was severe and consisted of extremely violent irrational incidents. Davis (1998) strengthens these findings by stating that domestic violence is often an irrational act of rage and passion that can produce murder-suicides.

She screamed at me in front of our daughter, smashed the TV when I refused to argue, tried to push me down the stairs - Blog 5

As evident from the blogs and previous literature (Flowers, 2000; Davis, 1998; Hamberger, 2008) female perpetrators can go to extreme lengths of violence that cause serious harm or worse, domestic homicides. Therefore, linking back to the first section of the chapter, the myth that domestic abusers are solely male is a completely fragile concept.

One day she hit me so hard on the shin with a solid object (I'm not even sure what it was) that I could see the bone through the wound- Blog 7

This is supported by Flowers (2000) who found that male victims of domestic abuse were subjected to serious physical violence by their female partners which between 1976 and 1977 had resulted in over 20,650 male victim domestic homicides. As already explored the idea of self-defence intertwines closely with female perpetrated abuse. A study undertaken by Muelleman and Burgess (1998) suggested that many male victims who sustained injuries had high rates of domestic violence perpetration themselves. However from the qualitative

data explored in this study, these findings do not match as the male victims from the blogs did not act aggressively or violently towards their partners which leads simultaneously onto the next section of this chapter.

The effects of domestic abuse on male victims

When analysing the blogs, an important and interesting theme that arose was the variation of different effects domestic abuse had on male victims. In the majority of the blogs, the after effects were similar for each male however as Desmarias, Gibas and Nicholls (2010) state, abuse can have different effects for different individuals.

Throughout the blogs it was apparent that the effects of domestic abuse on male victims were similar to their female counterparts. This complements research by Finley (2013) who suggests that the effects upon male victims from domestic abuse are very similar, if not identical to the effects upon females. Findings from the blogs also suggest that a prominent effect for male victims included long term, invisible psychological damage.

While I was seldom afraid of the violence – with which I thought I'd managed to cope – I did suffer deeper wounds- Blog 7

Coker et al (2002) and Desmarias, Gibas and Nicholls (2010) acknowledge how domestic abuse can have long term psychological damage on both male and female victims that can continue after the abuse has stopped as suggested by the suicidal quote below.

I don't want to live anymore and if you have read this post then I hope u can understand why- Blog 8

Psychological effects that were very strong in the findings were feelings of loneliness across the eight blogs, where the victims felt afraid or where the perpetrator had gained full control over the victim's life. Isolation and loneliness is potentially more predominant in male victims as they already face the stigma from society that is attached to domestic abuse (Hooks, 2000) of not fitting the 'ideal victim' category (Strobl, 2010) and issues of feeling too ashamed and embarrassed to report to the police (Finley, 2013).

It's a difficult and very alone feeling at times-Blog 2

Jackson (2007) highlights that isolation is a common effect of domestic abuse where the perpetrator stops the victim from seeing friends or family without permission, leaving the victim isolated.

My behaviour and lifestyle became reclusive; friends and colleagues were cut out of my private life- Blog 7

It was easier for me to not go out that [sic] face a barrage of questions- Blog 6

Another isolating effect of abuse that was apparent throughout the blogs was the loss of contact with children, however scarce the literature maybe. Findings from a study undertaken by Tsui (2014), suggested that deprived or no access to children was a very common effect of abuse for males linked with reasons for underreporting which will be discussed further in this chapter. Many respondents stated that they were concerned about custody battles (Tsui, 2014) which fit tightly with the findings from the blogs.

She has threatened to lose me my job and contact with my son if I put in an application for a court order- Blog 6

Findings by Hines and Douglas (2010) correlate with the findings by Tsui (2014) with discussion to the difficulties and barriers men face regarding their children as an effect of domestic abuse. The research suggests that many men stay in abusive relationships due to female abusers using children as a control mechanism because men are scared that women will get full custody, meaning loss of contact and fear of their child's welfare (Hines and Douglas, 2010). Findings from this study suggest that even when male victims tried their hardest to prevent losing contact with their children, the outcome was always negative which caused a severe long-term effect on their emotional welfare.

For the past 14 months I have had sporadic contact with my daughter- Blog 6

Sadly I've had limited access to my little girl since she has lied to the courts- Blog 5

Moving on, not only were the male victims throughout the blogs made to feel alone and isolated from their friends, families, children and the outside world, financial effects were also apparent through job loss. Findings from a study reported that 91% of victims had left or lost a job in the last year as a direct result of violence at home (Swanberg, Logan, and Macke, 2006). Other organisations such as Men's Advice Line (2014) and findings from the blogs show that domestic abuse can cause depression leading to job loss.

I was unable to re-launch of my life. I finished up being treated for depression, lost my job, and have not managed to find an equivalent position since – Blog 7

Swanberg, Logan and Macke (2006:353) state that workplace disruption is a common form of abuse that can have devastating effects for the victim by preventing '...the victim reaching the workplace either on time or at all'. This can be shown clearly from the blog analysis.

I lost my job because when I went she would argue with me and make my working life hell even stopping me from going until I was sacked- Blog 8

This interlinks with how both genders perpetrate their abuse by trying to gain control over the victim's life. As identified, the effects of domestic abuse on male victims differ but ultimately leave the victim feeling scared, isolated, financially unfit and helpless as a victim of crime.

This leads onto the next section of the chapter looking at the issues surrounding the implications of underreporting in this field.

Why didn't males report?

As suggested by previous literature, domestic abuse overall is a highly underreported crime however as the British Crime Survey suggest male victims are even more likely to not report their abuse (Walby and Allen, 2004).

Throughout the blogs there was a huge variation of reasons for the victims not reporting however the issue of not realising they were victims, denial and feelings of shame and embarrassment was a very prevalent reason. A study by Migliaccio (2001) as cited in Hogan et al (2012) revealed that a common issue behind males not reporting related to being too ashamed and embarrassed as their masculinity would be damaged due to the stigma of weakness attached to being a male victim of domestic abuse.

Figuratively speaking I was, however, in a tunnel and alone. I was kept there by my own shame, and a belief that I could and should "be a man" and handle such private matters- Blog 7

This quote compliments findings by Migliaccio (2001) and Finley (2013) who suggested that male victims did not report due to embarrassment and fear of emasculation, as men are supposed to be physically superior and therefore should be able to defend themselves and deal with private matters. This links back into literature discussed previously of the problematic stigma and notion of the 'ideal victim' leading to males feeling helpless, ashamed and confused as categorically they do not fit the victim profile.

"I was ashamed, outraged and felt cornered"- Blog 7

Unfortunately under-reporting of this crime by male victims has long term recurring effects as female perpetrated abuse is underreported making it a 'dark' figure of crime as suggested by Wilson (2009). In the long term this leads to more males feeling ashamed to report as there are limited statistics defining the copious amount of male victims. This leads on to males feeling alone and not believing, understanding or realising they are victims of crime.

I didn't realise then that I was the victim of abuse- Blog 5

Another key area for underreporting that was evident throughout the blogs and discussed previously was the issue of children and family commitment. Many men did not want to report their abuse or leave the relationships as they felt that they had family commitment and needed to stay to support the child.

A marriage will not save a bad relationship but it was a combination of social convention, religious background, my conservative upbringing, a feeling of responsibility to my new-born son- Blog 7

The above findings are backed by research undertaken by Hines and Douglas (2010) and Tsui (2014) who found that male victims of domestic abuse often do not leave the relationship or find difficulty leaving due to commitment to marriage and concern for their children. Blog 8 highlights the issue made by Hines and Douglas (2010) of male victims being concerned for the welfare of their children and therefore not reporting and staying within the abusive relationship.

I want everyone to understand that I moved back in with her because she was still smoking bud and I wanted Ellie to have a parent who was drug and anger free. Plus that way I knew Ellie was getting what she needed- Blog 8

Police and Criminal Justice Response

When analysing the data and looking at under-reporting, an important thematic area of focus was support for male victims. From reviewing the literature, it was evident that when/if men did report, there is poor and stigmatised support available from the Criminal justice system. From analysing the blogs it is visible that the male victims experienced high levels of difficulty gaining Criminal Justice support with only two positive references regarding police response across all eight blogs.

The most common negativity highlighted was the fact they were not treated as a victim at face value and were unhappy about being assessed as the perpetrator. This links in with previous research by Dispatches (1998) who found that 25% of males who rang the police for help were arrested. This is also supported by a follow up by Dewar Research in 2001 (George and Yarwood, 2004) who found from 100 male victims of domestic abuse, many felt that the police discriminated against them with a fifth being arrested even though they were the clear victim.

Even know [sic] I didn't rape her the police really wanted to charge me and lock me up (a police officer told me that on the way back into the cells) - Blog 8

It is visible that the fear of male victims feeling discriminated against and being disbelieved became a reality once reporting.

I don't necessarily feel lucky when I found out I had to be assessed to ensure I was a male victim and not a perpetrator - Blog 3

The above findings and references from this section, compliment research undertaken by Hogan et al (2012) who found that a common theme apparent from the effects of domestic abuse on male victims included the issue of being re-victimised and discriminated against by

the Criminal justice system as help is set up solely for female victims. Therefore male victims feel they are treated suspiciously and also accused of being the perpetrator whilst asking for support unlike their female counterpart.

I wouldn't have faced half the problems I did if I had been a female victim- Blog 3

Research results from a study by Tsui (2014:125) showed similar responses that many male victims felt the police were actively unhelpful suggesting 'Police and court believe the women and always side with them'.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear to suggest from exploring the academic literature and research surrounding the topic of female perpetrated domestic abuse, that male victims are not receiving the equal recognition and equal treatment as their female counterpart.

As can be seen from the first section of the analysis chapter, male victims of domestic abuse, through their recent experiences are still facing prejudice and discrimination due to the ingrained ideology and perceptions surrounding domestic abuse. It is important to note that this stigma has variations of long term effects for male victims as it leaves them feeling angry and fearful whilst also influencing their beliefs as a victim. Throughout the findings, male victims questioned themselves vigorously as they did not fit the 'ideal victim' category.

With regards to section one of the analysis chapter it is apparent that male victims still find themselves facing a second barrier when trying to gain victim status, despite the domestic abuse definition from the Home office (2013) suggesting it is a crime '... regardless of gender or sexuality'. The male victims throughout this study, linking with other findings from academic literature faced different treatment and suggested they fell into a 'joke category' (Blog 2).

Other apparent findings throughout this study included the visible variations of abuse male victims were subjected to. A strong finding highlighted from this research indicated that male victims usually get coined as the abuser through lies and threats by the female perpetrator. Much of the literature surrounding female perpetrated abuse suggested that male victims were usually perpetrators and females were the victims as suggested by the self-defence notion. However, from the findings, none of the male victims in this study had used violence against their partners. That is not to say that in certain cases females do not retaliate in the instance of self-defence but this study highlights and also clarifies that self-defence is not always a justification but more of an excuse.

Similarly this qualitative study has indicated that male victims of domestic abuse across all eight blogs experienced high levels of severe physical abuse. This was complemented by literature and previous studies surrounding the topic area therefore highlighting an important yet ironic finding which disregards the stigma that females do not perpetrate domestic abuse.

Throughout this study, the effect of domestic abuse on male victims was explored extensively, which is an important addition to domestic abuse research as currently minimal research is currently available in this field. Findings suggested similar to the available literature that male victims suffer similar effects to females. Key areas identified that although yes, they do face similar effects, the psychological effect of isolation seemed to be more apparent in male victims as not only were they isolated by their perpetrators, they also felt further isolated in society as a victim of domestic abuse. It was apparent that male victims suffered isolation continuously with a predominant effect being the loss of contact or deprived contact with their children. This also linked in with key reasons for not reporting. Job loss was also a prominent effect of domestic abuse from this study which is interesting as limited research exists on this area.

Moreover male victims of domestic abuse struggle to gain victim status and support. It was apparent that this led to them doubting and disbelieving that they were victims. This therefore, led to under-reporting. This study and current literature suggests that males are finding it hard to report due to feelings of shame as they believed that being a female perpetrated domestic abuse victim was emasculating, making them weak. As suggested throughout the analysis chapter, the use of children was a main effect of domestic abuse as well as a reason for the victims not reporting. It was clear male victims were concerned for their child's welfare and also contact issues. Likewise other concerns and reasons for under-reporting by males seemed to be the lack of support available for male victims by the police. This was highlighted continuously throughout the blogs and it is reasonable to say that male victims are not taken seriously or at face value as a victim by the police.

To summarise this study, the research has provided further understanding of female perpetrated domestic abuse and the effects and experiences that male victims endure. A key and unexpected theme with scarce research that was highlighted throughout this study was the use of children by female perpetrators which had phenomenal effects on male victims. It is therefore highly recommended that each area of this study should be further explored but in particular, the use of children in female perpetrated domestic abuse incidents. The lack of knowledge and ignorance that exists on the topic could be potentially endangering children

as they are left unprotected in the hands of the female perpetrator. Although society sees women as weak, innocent and vulnerable, this study has highlighted otherwise.

On recommending further research, this study had limitations due to a low participant rate therefore further research with a wider scale of male victims participants would be beneficial in validating, expanding and providing a more explicit set of detailed findings adding further knowledge to male victims experiences of domestic abuse.

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