

Men's experience of domestic abuse in Scotland: An Update

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Executive Summary

- In 2013, Brian Dempsey completed a [literature review](#) to identify and explore research that was relevant to understanding men's experiences of domestic abuse in Scotland. His intention at the time was to provide a reference point for the development of both policy and future research; specifically, he hoped it would be a starting point to furthering how we work with men in Scotland who have experienced abuse, the friends, family and children of these men, and also the needs of the perpetrators of such abuse. Dempsey's review covered the literature up to 2012 (with some reference to new literature in 2013).
- Five years on from its publication, the aim of this current literature review is to consider the literature published, and policy changes that have occurred since 2013 with an aim to reflect on the recommendations made in the 2013 report.
- The updated Scottish Crime and Justice Survey presents data that show there are a significant number of men who experience domestic abuse within Scotland. The data also highlight the type of abuse they experience, the impact this has, and also that many men do not recognise their experience as abuse.
- The academic literature since 2013 exploring men's experiences further highlights the range of physical, psychological, sexual, and financial abuse that they experience. The more recent literature has also contributed some new understanding, for example around aspects of controlling behaviour such as 'Gaslighting'.
- More recently there has been recognition of "legal and administrative aggression", and this is seen within the more recent literature. This involves one partner abusing the other through the use of legal and administrative systems and can include behaviour such as: false accusations to authorities of physical or sexual abuse of the partner, making false accusations that around abuse of children, withholding contact with children, financial manipulation, and ruining partners' reputation at work or in the local community.
- Whilst the SCJS data suggest some men are reporting their experience to service and criminal justice agencies, the literature also describes a number of barriers that prevent other men from doing so. This includes fear of legal and administrative aggression from their partners (e.g., through false allegations, parental alienation), fear of not being believed, and barriers relating to socially constructed masculine gender roles.
- It is clear that even within the more recent research, there is still a strong influence of gendered stereotypes within service and practice. These stereotypes often govern the response men get when they attempt to report or help-seek and becomes a barrier to these attempts too. This often leads to men being viewed as, or certainly at least being assumed to be, perpetrators.
- Methodological limitations in the existing literature likely mean that the figures we see are an under estimate of the prevalence of male victims of domestic abuse. Some crime victimisation surveys require men to identify their experience as a crime, which they often do not. Removing this requirement and asking about specific behaviours increases the reporting rates by a factor of 16 (Straus, 1999). Whilst we know more about men's

experiences than we have before, there is still a bias in method that focuses on help-seeking samples, and those where men have identified as victims.

- There are still gaps within the existing literature that prevents us having a full understanding of men's experience. For example, the majority of the intersectional groups that Dempsey highlighted as needing more attention are still lacking this research. To allow us to respond to the diverse range of needs that male victims have, we need to understand the experiences of those from different cultures, age groups, geographical locations, and social classes. We need to understand more the way in which men with disabilities experience domestic abuse, BME men, those within LBG relationships, and those who identify on all areas of the gender and sexuality spectrums.
- Whilst we are starting to understand more about men's experiences of abuse within relationships, we still know very little about the way this abuse changes or escalates once the relationship has dissolved. Ongoing divorce procedures, residence negotiations, and child contact arrangements present opportunities for ongoing harassment and abuse.
- The current review concludes with some recommendations, namely, there is a need for:
 1. men's voices to be more a part of the policy and practice narrative within Scotland
 2. more research that works with different groups of men (e.g., older men, BME men) to understand experiences of this heterogeneous group
 3. more research to form a more detailed understanding of the barriers that men experience to be able to tackle them more effectively
 4. work to challenge the "public story" around domestic abuse.