

Male Victims of Domestic Abuse Report 2021

If you're a man in an abusive relationship, where do you go to be heard? Who is listening? Do you even know you are in an abusive relationship?

These are a few of the questions our clients ask themselves repeatedly before they eventually reach out to us at Dads Unlimited.

Abuse of men is happening far more often than people expect in both heterosexual and same-sex relationships. Regardless of age or occupation, it happens to men from all cultures and different backgrounds. The press and social media have improved their ad campaigns to include men, which has given more men the confidence to speak out.

Within our core services at Dads Unlimited over the last four years, 37.8% of male clients present as domestic abuse victims and 11.8% were not sure if they were domestic abuse victims when they registered.

Even with the mainstream media and social media on-side, men are still reluctant to report abuse because they feel embarrassed, fear someone won't believe them, or are scared that their partner will exact some revenge upon them in retaliation. Many men worry they will have difficulty with the authorities believing them or that someone will minimise their abuse because they are a man.

There is a lot of misconception about men suffering from domestic abuse. The consensus is that men are not victims of violence, especially by a woman who is half their size.

There are also gender stereotypes, and social stigmas that exist within society, which construct men as invincible and portray men as more than capable of defending themselves. These gender stereotypes enable a woman to be more aggressive to a man because it's, wrongly, more acceptable for a woman to hit a man. This idea does prevent men from being considered as a victim.

Our clients have suffered much abuse, including hitting, biting, punching, knife slashing and burning with boiling water, irons and cigarettes. For many of these assaults, our clients did not report the abuse, as they believed the Police would not take any action.

Of course, domestic abuse is not limited to violence. Emotional and verbal abuse can be just as damaging. Our clients receive death threats, false allegations made about them to friends, employers and the Police; their abusers will also find other ways to manipulate and isolate them. Their abuser will verbally abuse, belittle and humiliate them in front of friends, colleagues, family and on social media. They can be possessive, act jealous, or harass with accusations of being unfaithful. Clients have had their car keys and medication hidden in an attempt to control where they go and who they see. An abuser will use fear, guilt, shame and intimidation to wear these men down and keep them 'under their thumb'.

Financial abuse is also regularly spoken about in client contact; how the abuser will try to control the spending of money and deliberately default on joint financial obligations.

Clients talk about how their ex took their name off the joint account, but they were told they needed both parties' signature when they had previously spoken to the bank. The client is then liable for all the debt on the accounts. Clients talk about their ex-partners applying for credit cards in their names without their knowledge, then they end up in colossal debt, and when reported, the authorities tell them that there is no action they can take against them. One client had been separated from his wife for two years; he looks after their children full time. She refuses to pay child maintenance due to being the mother, and the child maintenance service has said they cannot make her pay even though she is employed full time. However, she gave his bank details to her debt company, and they debited money from his account to clear her debt. The authorities told him it was fraud, but it was not a serious enough crime to make a conviction.

Men are no different than women when it comes to their children. But in society's eyes, mothers should remain the primary carer for the children, and dads have to face a turbulent child arrangements battle in court to see their children. Our clients often explain that they are too scared to leave their partner because if they do, their partner has told them that if they report them to the Police, they will never see their children again. This emotional abuse has our clients believe that they are better off staying with their partner than to leave. Clients also feel there is little support for men, so they feel they are entirely alone.

Regardless of gender, ending a relationship, even an abusive one, is rarely easy. It becomes even more challenging if you've been isolated from friends and family, manipulated, threatened, controlled, or physically and emotionally broken down. Clients feel they have to stay in a relationship because they feel ashamed. Men can feel great shame that they have been abused and are unable to stand up for themselves. They can feel failed in their role as a man, husband, partner or father.

Clients have spoken to us about their fear. In one example, their partner will 'out them' being in a same-sex relationship as their family and friends are unaware. They feel completely trapped and feel the only way is to carry on in the relationship with this abusive partner but know that the abuse will exacerbate over time.

In some close communities, there is a protection of that community by not disclosing any abuse; this pressure can come from individuals or the community. Disclosing any abuse would be seen to bring shame to that family and their community.

We have had a case of honour-based violence against a man, and there is little help for male honour-based violence victims due to the lack of awareness.

There are also many barriers for men to report their abuse, including honour, shame, and masculinity. They are also fearful that if reported, they would be shamed or ridiculed. One client told us he was terrified as he felt no one would believe him. His family knew about the

domestic abuse he suffered from his wife, but he was given constant death threats if he was to even think about leaving her. The Police regularly stopped the client, and they wanted to do drug checks; he felt this was also due to his skin colour. One time his wife was with him, and she told him if he opened his mouth, “he would not live to see the next day”. He became very anxious when he saw or heard a Police car and ended up changing his car as he could not cope with the way the Police treated him when he had done nothing wrong. He said, “how could I report the abuse I was suffering, as they saw me as a criminal and would never see me as a victim”.

At Dads Unlimited, we support many Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) clients. Many have been treated very differently by authorities than White men. These clients talk about calling the Police due to the domestic violence they were enduring and that their wife/partner was attacking them. When the Police came into the house, they felt that the Police had made their mind up instantly; because they were black and their wife/partner was white, they must be the abuser. They were immediately put in handcuffs and taken to the Police station.

In one example shared with us, following many calls to the Police previously for DA, the client told us that he decided to record the conversation on his phone to protect him. The Police officer told him he was resisting arrest, and he was forced to the floor, put in handcuffs and punched at the back of the head by the officer. This action was picked up on the officer’s body camera and seen by the client and another Police officer.

However, when the client’s solicitor asked for a copy of this footage, the incident shown was fuzzy/blurred.

This client struggles when he hears a Police car or sees the Police as he is so fearful that more allegations will be made. The trauma associated with his experience has manifested into a form of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Clients frequently talk about evidence not being disclosed in the Police reports, being questioned about their evidence, and their partners not even being interviewed, taking over ten weeks to make a statement - but if the woman contacted the Police, the Police would visit within days of making the call.

We had one BAME client who had been suffering domestic abuse for over three years; he reported this to the Police, but decided not to press charges. Once his wife found out that he had been to the Police, she accused him of rape, and he was held in custody for 24 hours. Social services moved her and the children into a woman’s refuge, and the children now live solely with the mother, who he states is a perpetrator of abuse.

One client disclosed that he was told by a Police officer, “Why did you stay then if it was that bad!”

In some cases, we have been told by BAME clients that if a black man speaks to a Police officer asking for help, they are mischaracterised as having an attitude problem and treated very differently from a white man.

There are problems with the authorities, particularly around how male victims are treated by officers and how they feel uninformed on the progress of their cases. They are not receiving help or being believed in the first instance. Many clients feel they are not listened to by the Police. Clients told us that information about them was not treated in strict confidence, which potentially exposing them to further risk of harm.

Indeed, in us speaking to a Police officer, we were told that in most cases, it is men who are arrested when a domestic call is made. The positive arrest policy has resulted in a lot of our clients that they are always arrested. Some are even told that they can't arrest the woman because she is the mother.

One client told us that his wife attacked him, and when the Police turned up, they saw he had visible injuries. But he was arrested due to the mum breastfeeding their baby.

Another client, who is a Police officer, was attacked by his ex, and she phoned the Police. He was arrested because they have a positive arrest policy, so they have to arrest someone.

Being a male victim of domestic abuse is not seen in the same way as being a female victim of domestic abuse.

As one client said to us, *"How far does it go before the abuse is proven? Does it take me to kill myself before I am taken seriously?"*.

Or in another case, *"What do you do, when the woman who took your breath away, becomes the woman who makes you hold your breath in terror?"*

As a result of the people we have worked with, we would like to propose some recommendations to fill the gaps in service provision with Kent for male victims of domestic abuse:

1. Domestic abuse training about male victims for responding authorities and agencies. We understand that 40% of Police call-outs are for domestic incidents. Officers need support and training in key areas of domestic abuse to be proficient in their work. To be able to recognise and spot the signs of abuse, understanding that men can also be the victims and also understand the nuances of cultural issues.
2. We would like to invite a member of the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner's staff to attend our adapted male victims Phoenix Domestic Abuse Programme, to hear victims and survivors speak about their experiences.
3. We would like to see a tailored and bespoke male victim support service.

4. We believe that a newly designed bespoke and non-adapted male victim recovery programme should be considered, as the issues that male victims suffer are significantly different from female victims.
5. A bespoke recovery programme for the LGBTQ community.
6. A female perpetrator programme should also be designed and offered throughout Kent.
7. Further education and training in schools, colleges and universities for staff to recognise students and male parents who may be victims of female perpetrated domestic abuse.
8. For all Domestic Abuse Forums across Kent to be inclusive and have a rich diversity of stakeholders that represent their communities; and also include organisations who primarily support male and LGBTQ victims (BAME and non-BAME).

This report builds on a significant amount of experience, understanding and insight from working with male victims over the past four years, and has been through our delivery of the Phoenix Programme adapted for male victims, as well as our core services of Mentoring and Pastoral Support.

Two case studies are also included below. All names have been changed to protect the identities of all parties.

Lisa Bowden

Director of Welfare and Pastoral

March 2021



Tom's Story

Our life as a married couple was pretty normal, with not too many ups and downs. We enjoyed socialising and going on holidays. Falling pregnant did not happen when we hoped it would, so we turned to IVF. Our daughter was born, and Sarah's motherly instinct took over to care for Tia, which at first was lovely to see. But Sarah would not let me hold her as she said she was a wiggler and I would drop her. I tried a few times to pick Tia up out of her cot, but Sarah came up behind me and grabbed my arm, digging her nails in and shouting in my ear to make me put Tia back down. On one occasion, she grabbed me by my ear and tore the base. Sarah held Tia close to her all of the time, if she went for a shower, Tia would be put in her bouncer and taken into the bathroom, and the door would be locked. Over time I tried to get involved with feeding but was told she would choke if I fed her. I was not allowed to take part in bedtimes or play with Tia. I was completely shut out of my daughter's life. From the day Tia was born, Sarah slept in her bedroom and never came back into our bed. If I tried to get close to Sarah, she would slap me around my face and call me many unkind names.

A couple of years past with the same behaviours, Sarah decided she wanted another baby and did not want Tia to be an only child. So, we tried IVF again and fell pregnant with Daniel. Sarah was not as attentive to Daniel as she was to Tia, so I was allowed to help at times, but only with Daniel, Sarah still kept Tia close to her. As the children got older, they were always kept away from me. When I came home from work, the children would be moved upstairs to their bedroom, which they shared with Sarah. At the weekends, if I went to play with Daniel within minutes, he would be called by Sarah to do something with her and Tia. If Sarah went out, she would take the children and refused to leave them with me. If I asked to take them to the park, Sarah would tell me, "if something happened to you all, I would never forgive myself". My family were never allowed to visit the house for many excuses. Sarah would regularly shout at me that my family interfered and constantly tried to control their lives. I would have to go alone to visit them, which upset my parents a great deal.

Sarah would often cook for me when she cooked for her and the children, but I realised after I started to feel very unwell that she was doused my dinner with salt. I also found dog and cat hairs in the food. So, I cook for myself when I get in from work or eat at work. The children often bake with Sarah, and once my daughter gave me a cake and said it is poisoned and went back into the kitchen laughing, so I thought best I did not eat it. My son loves rugby, so I decided to buy him a rugby ball, it never turned up. When I contacted the company, they sent me a photo of it at my front door with my wife's legs and fluffy slippers in the background. I searched the house and found it hidden at the back of a wardrobe!

More recently, I go home a lot later from work due to Sarah making the children go upstairs to their bedroom when I get back, which does upset them. Sarah constantly tries to start arguments and tells me I take over the house when I get home. But I so desperately want to spend time with my children, but Sarah will not let me near them. I worry when I go to bed what I am going to find in my bed. I have found thorns sticking up through the sheets, kitchen

knives, sewing needles, my bed has been wet many times when I pulled back the covers, I had a plug put into my pillow facing upwards. This is generally a weekly occurrence and is now causing me much anxiety about going to bed at night.

Sarah has full control of my bank account, and I do not have a password to get into the accounts. She has always told me that because she is at home, she needs to take care of all the bills and pay for what needs to be paid. If I need any money, I have to ask her, and if she is going out, she will get some cash out, but if not, then she tells me that I will have to wait as she can't run around for me as she has the children to look after.

I contacted Dads Unlimited, and they have been helping take me forward, but I am so scared that if I leave, I will lose my children forever.

Jordon's story

I met my partner Margaret. We were married within six months, and she fell pregnant very quickly. Everything seemed amazing.

After having Toby, our relationship changed dramatically for the worse, and the aggression and abuse started. I thought she might have been suffering from Post Natal Depression. I decided to take her out for an evening and arranged for her parents to come and look after Toby. We had a lovely evening, but in the taxi, on the way home, Margaret accused me of fancying the waitress. I did not know what she was talking about and could not even remember what the waitress looked like, as we had been served by a few. She kept shouting at me and punching my body. I felt very embarrassed as the taxi driver kept looking in his mirror. We got out of the taxi, went into the house, and said goodbye to her parents. As soon as they left, Margaret threw the glass that she was drinking from at me but luckily missed. She threatened that if I were having an affair, she would take Toby away, and I would never see him again. I decided to sleep on the sofa, and in the morning, she came downstairs as if nothing had happened, so I did not mention it.

When I went to work on Monday, that was when the phone calls started. Just a quick call to check you got to work safely, just a quick call to see if you are having a good day, just a quick call you had a lunch break and text after text after text. I was struggling to concentrate at work, but if I tried to speak to her about it, she would get angry and say that I didn't care about her and would call me many insulting names. She would often throw objects at me and would wave a knife at me and say that she would cut off my private parts if she found out I was sleeping with other women. I constantly reassured her that I never looked at other women. At times she would get upset and tell me how sorry she was and that it would not happen again. This behaviour continued for a couple of years, and we had another son Thomas. I was overjoyed we were having another child but also desperately unhappy being with Margaret. Margaret had a few issues feeding Thomas, so I was told to make a bed up on the floor, and that's where I then slept for the rest of our relationship. I was only allowed into the bed when she said it

was time to have sex, but I had to go back onto the floor to sleep. I was suffering with my back, and she constantly told me I was an old man, and why was she with me.

Once the boys went to school, Margaret became friendly with a few other mums, and she started to go out in the evenings and drink quite heavily. When she came home, she would walk around the bed and stand on me as I slept on the floor. If I made a comment, she would kick me where ever she stood. I regularly had bruises on my body from this. On the odd occasion, she was sick on me after drinking so much alcohol. I felt I could not tell anyone about this as I was ashamed of what I had become.

This one evening, Margaret came home earlier than normal; I was sitting in the lounge watching TV. She started shouting at me, and I asked her to please leave the room. She did not leave, so I got up and tried to. She grabbed my arm and pushed me against the wall, and told me she would have me killed. I eventually left the room and went up to my bed on the floor. Within a couple of hours, I was woken by the Police accusing me of attacking Margaret, and I was arrested and spent the night in a cell. When I got home, Margaret was not there, and her parents were there with the children. They told me they had been called and told to come to the house. As they arrived, Margaret walked out with her bags and got into a man's car.

Margaret never came back, and the children do occasionally see her though it is a struggle to make them go. Dads Unlimited have supported me and put a provision in for the children through their schools to support them emotionally. I am trying to get my life together, but it is not easy being a male survivor.

