

Response to the Welsh Government White Paper: Consultation on legislation to end violence against women, DA and sexual violence (Wales)

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Domestic abuse (DA) is indeed of great concern and the commitment of the Welsh Assembly to address this issue is to be commended and supported. However, in my opinion, a misunderstanding about the incidence, nature, causes and methods of tackling DA is operating in this White Paper which results in the negative stereotyping of men and overlooks the harm that children can face in a family unit, from male and female victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse; this urgently needs to be addressed. In my response I critique the ideology and the methodology that dominates in the DA field today and draw your attention to alternative ways of constructing and addressing the issue.

Within the White Paper DA is conceptualised as

- a mainly male behaviour rather than a human behaviour
- a 'one person' issue rather than a relational or systemic issue
- political (DA is caused by men holding sexist beliefs) rather than psychological
- homogenous; having a monolithic, predetermined reason rather than related to a unique set of circumstances and
- having its roots in a single cause (male sexism) rather than the variety of other possible causes which practitioners and academic

researchers in the field have regularly identified over the last twenty years.

In short, I would argue that the statistics and underpinning assumptions, and consequently the methodology for dealing with DA, are flawed and have been regularly contradicted in empirical research here and in the United States. Indeed, last year a shift in thinking on the treatment of DA occurred within the UK Ministry of Justice (2012) and in a National Offender Management Service [briefing note](#), it was announced that the Integrated Domestic Abuse Programme (IDAP), which is based on the radical feminist US Duluth model, is to be abandoned because of high attrition rates (approximately 35 – 40%), a lack of robust evidence for effectiveness, too narrow a focus (men in heterosexual relationships, “patriarchy” and “power and control”) and because it has not kept up with changes/developments in practice e.g. strengths-based approaches. This is really good news for those of us who have been lobbying for a less political and more psychological approach to DA. A new programme which is based on a generalised anger model of violence, rather than rooted in patriarchal norms, has been successfully piloted; however, it is not clear when this will be rolled out; for now, the old programme continues in prisons and the probation service and the patriarchal terrorist stereotype is still widely accepted without critique in government and voluntary agencies and other helping professions. I am curious about why the Welsh Assembly is not looking at different approaches.

Evidence that this radical feminist approach to DA is ideologically driven

rather than evidence based is further evidenced by there having been little or no programme development since its inception in 1981 and, in at least one geographical area, the Probation Service shows videos to programme participants of men exhibiting different abusive behaviours who are wearing flared trousers and have permed hair.

The construction of DA in the White Paper is an ideological one; it stems from a radical feminist frame of reference, a political ideology that fosters hostility towards men and is not evidence based. The polarised construction of DA as a male 'perpetrator' and a female 'victim' originates in Duluth, Minnesota, USA; it is grounded in the event of a single, particularly brutal murder of a female by her male spouse in 1980; the dynamics of which have been extrapolated across all incidents of domestic abuse ever since. I will argue that this understanding of DA is unsophisticated because it consists of a single cause explanation (men are assumed to be sexist and seeking to dominate women), it ignores a variety of other potential contributing factors and avoids the true complexity of the issue.

Since the 1980's a radical feminist explanation of intimate partner abuse (DA) has dominated; a stereotype of men as 'patriarchal terrorists' (Johnson, 2008) as controlling and dominating has emerged where they are constructed as 'perpetrators' and females are 'victims'. Men are believed to be 'culturally conditioned to subjugate women' (ibid) and executing 'deliberate, calculated and conscious behaviour intended to control and intimidate a carefully chosen female target' (Parker Hall, 2008). Johnson (2008) argues that there is scant evidence for this

representation and that as few as 3% of the whole male population matches this profile yet every man who exhibits an abusive behaviour of whatever gravity (a push or a shove or grievous bodily harm) are treated similarly. Within the DA arena, an environment endures within which it is politically incorrect to say that some acts of abuse are not as serious as others even though the law clearly discriminates between for example a breach of the peace, actual bodily harm and grievous bodily harm.

This 'one size fits all' approach to DA leads to the inhumanity of men with very different profiles coming together in the IDAP programme. I offer one example here; a man I interviewed who had undergone the IDAP programme told me how his ex-female partner of three months had been refusing to move out of his flat for two months and had never made any contribution towards mortgage, utility or food bills; in this tense atmosphere she told him that she was going to bring her new boyfriend back to his home and he slapped her. This man (who accepts that he had a part in allowing this situation to occur) was shocked and fearful to find himself in a learning environment where one of his fellow group members had poured cooking oil over his partner and threatened to set light to her and who had only been prevented from doing this by a relative who had called in unexpectedly.

The patriarchal terrorist stereotype has been heavily criticised as a theory that has arisen from ideological motives rather than sound empirical evidence (Dutton & Corvo, 2006; Dutton & Nicholls, 2005; Gelles & Strauss, 1988; Graham-Kevan, 2007; Hammel, 2005a); a

paradigm that has developed amongst family violence activists and researchers 'that maintains a monolithic view of a complex social problem' (Dutton & Nicholls, 2005).

This polarisation operates in the face of much empirical research which has found that DA is actually a more symmetrical and more mutual phenomenon in dating and marital relationships (including Johnson, 2006; Anderson, 2002; Archer, 2000, 2006; Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2009) and that it occurs as often in gay and lesbian relationships as it does in heterosexual relationships ((Henderson, 2003); indeed some research has shown that it happens more frequently in lesbian relationships (Lie & Gentlewarrier, 1991).

A gender inclusive perspective encourages examination of both men's and women's use and explanation of DA and respects the unique context or situation within which it occurs; further, 'it incorporates a variety of theoretical standpoints to understand why heterosexual and gay men and heterosexual women and lesbian women engage in it' (Dixon & Graham-Kevan, 2011).

Analysts and practitioners in this field, including myself, are increasingly arguing that DA occurs for a variety of reasons, presents in a variety of ways and occurs more because of psychological and emotional factors than political ones. Although men and women can equally harbour negative attitudes towards the opposite sex (misogyny and misandry), in my experience this is a symptom rather than the cause.

Within psychotherapy, domestic abuse is more likely to be referred to as a 'rage behaviour which has its roots in trauma' (Parker Hall, 2008), has been linked to the inability to regulate affect (Schoore, 1993), the 'protest' that signifies a ruptured attachment (Holmes, 2001) and to an 'abusive personality' which develops from early exposure to violence, shaming and lack of a secure base (Dutton, 2007).

The most common form of DA that dominates general surveys is 'situational couple violence' (SCV) with 86% of both men and women reporting using and experiencing violence in their relationships (Johnson, 2006); SCV is not part of a general pattern of control [but is] provoked [in response to] the tensions or emotions of a particular encounter' (ibid). For this reason, DA is understood as a relationship issue rather than an individual's issue and always a unique event linked to a particular set of circumstances; so it is necessary to take into account the interpersonal dynamics of a relationship as well as the context or situation in which it arose.

Further, research has shown (2005, Slep et al) that where both parents engage in physical DA their child(ren) is/are three times more at risk of harm than families where one parent is the sole DA aggressor; therefore we should take note of the cause and types of DA that exist beyond just men's violence to women as it greatly impacts our future generation.

Treating DA is a multi-billion dollar industry worldwide where the status quo and vested interests are strongly defended. The prevailing treatment within this paradigm 'was developed by people who didn't

understand anything about therapy' (Dutton & Corvo, 2006) and comprises entirely of challenging men's sexist beliefs. This approach has dominated the DA arena in the UK, USA and many other countries for over 30 years; it has flourished worldwide in spite of being 'largely ineffective' (Babcock et al, 2004); it's my belief that this poor quality treatment would not be tolerated in any other field e.g. health care or education and only continues because a climate has been constructed where it is politically incorrect to challenge it (Parker Hall, 2012). Those who challenge the hegemonic ideology are accused of putting women and children's lives at risk, of blaming women or of minimising or denying men's abuse.

I work in a non-gendered or gender inclusive paradigm where rage is constructed as a human issue which any one of us can exhibit to a greater or lesser degree when we become overwhelmed with emotion and cannot process it. I challenge the patriarchal terrorist stereotype and treatment programmes based on challenging sexist beliefs which, in the UK, has been adopted by Women's Aid, RESPECT and, until very recently, in prisons and probation services by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS).

Archer et al (2012) have noted the dearth of an evidence base and critiqued the flawed assumptions that RESPECT, which is substantially Home Office funded, have put forward to validate their practice in this field. A visit to the research page on [RESPECT's website](#) reveals that, after twelve plus years in existence, the only research they have carried out is very recent and sought to establish what criteria is necessary to

measure programme outcomes. There is a further briefing paper which reviews the 'evidence of effects domestic violence perpetrator programmes on women's safety' which includes no primary data generated by their accredited programmes or members, only secondary, mainly US data.

Thorough and peer reviewed work of those with a different opinion should not be ignored in a debate that has such grave implications for men, women, families and our future generations.

On the grounds of equality and justice I appeal to the Welsh Assembly to take this opportunity to question the rationale of a single cause for DA and the political ideology on which its white paper is based; to review the considerable academic and successful outcomes in therapy research, to explore other, more recently developed ways of theorising about DA in order to deliver a policy which engenders a more sophisticated and non-gendered response and which is above all more effective in addressing this issue and more cost effective.

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