

FACTSHEET ON GENDER and FAMILY VIOLENCE

Most men do not use violence against women. Although family violence can be prevalent in any and all communities, violence by men is often the most serious and lethal type of family violence in New Zealand, and the victims are predominantly women and children.

Women are more likely than men to experience incidents of serious intimate partner violence, and to suffer serious physical and psychological effects as a result.

The causes and effects of violent behaviour are complex. There is an abundance of research that shows that men's violence is more likely to result in serious injury, intimidation and fear and women are more likely to use violence in self defence.

Some women are violent – in same and different sex relationships, and towards their children – even though, statistically, most family violence is perpetrated by men.

All victims of violence need to be offered support, compassion and interventions and all perpetrators need to be offered support and the opportunity to change their behaviour. Family violence is not OK.

Relevant statistics

Research that looked at family violence deaths in more detail found that from 2002-2008 there 186 family violence deaths found the perpetrators of all family violence homicides are predominantly male (86% of partner homicides, 60% of child homicides, 73% of other family homicides) (NZ Family Violence Death Review 2012).

78% of the partner homicides in NZ involve men killing their current or ex female partner; 9% involve men killing their ex-partner's new boyfriend; and 2% involve women killing their male partner (NZ Family Violence Death Review).

1 in 4 women and 1 in 8 men report they have been a victim of an offence by their partner during their lifetime (includes behaviours from serious assault to petty threats). 85% of the serious partner offences were against female victims (2009 NZ Crime and Safety Survey).

8% of men, compared to 19.5% of women said they had been frightened by their partner's threats; 4 ½ times more women than men reported violence in a heterosexual dating relationship; and 3 times more women than men reported violence by an ex-partner of the opposite sex (2001 NZ National Survey of Crime Victims).

29% of women and 9% of men experience unwanted and distressing sexual contact over their lifetime (2009 NZ Crime and Safety Survey).

Of those who applied for a Protection Order under the Domestic Violence Act, 91% are women (Ministry of Justice).

Around 85% of those arrested for family violence offences in New Zealand are men, and for sexual violence, 98 % of those arrested are men (NZ Police).

Of those who experience elder abuse, 70% are women (Age Concern).

A New Zealand review of all child homicides between 1991 and 2000 found that in cases where a child was killed by their parent or caregiver- 54% of perpetrators were fathers, 40% were mothers, and 6% of cases involved both parents. When children were killed by other people, men were the perpetrators in 78% of cases, women in 20%.

For most violent crimes (violence in streets, pubs and sports-fields) the perpetrators are more likely to be men – family violence is no different (a US study confirmed that 93% of all kinds of violence experienced by adult women and 86% of all violence experienced by adult men was perpetrated by men).

Understanding the gender analysis of family violence

Family violence researchers have identified different kinds of family violence and different ways of collecting information in order to understand it.

Community studies across the general population (such as Victims of Crime Surveys, and the longitudinal studies) often find similar numbers of men and women report being hit, pushed or assaulted by their partner.

Data from Police, Courts, and domestic violence services show a different picture – the majority of reported violence is perpetrated by men against women and children.

The reasons for these contradictory findings are differences in the way violence is **defined & measured**.

Some violence is more lethal and harmful than others:

- **Power and control violence** or **coercive controlling violence** is controlling behaviour and psychological abuse, often, but not always accompanied by physical and sexual abuse or the threat of violence. This is usually one person controlling their partner or family members through fear. This is mostly perpetrated by men, and results in the most harm to adult and child victims.
- **Resistive violence** involves a victim of power and control violence retaliating or using violence in self-defence. This is mostly perpetrated by women.
- **Situational** or **common-couple violence** is adults using violence to resolve conflicts. In many cases, the violence does not result in serious physical harm, but in some cases the violence is chronic and dangerous. Adult victims are not fearful or controlled, although children are negatively affected. Men and women use this kind of violence roughly equally.
- The least common forms of family violence are **anti-social violence** (perpetrated by people who are violent to everyone) or **pathological violence** (violence that is direct result of mental illness or injury).

Community surveys mostly identify *situational partner violence*. Police, Courts and domestic violence services mostly see *power and control partner violence*.

While community surveys show roughly equal numbers of men and women have been subject to some form of partner violence in their lifetime (prevalence) they also show women are:

- Victimised more often (incidence)
- More likely to be injured or killed
- More likely to be stalked, sexually abused, and experience violence after separation
- More likely to be fearful and suffer psychological, social and physical consequences.

Community surveys often measure violence by looking at number of “hits” without considering the context, meaning, intention and consequences of the violence which are different for men and women (see attached fact sheet which explains the different research methodologies).

When looking at child abuse, research indicates that women and men are more likely to be equal perpetrators, although there are differences in the nature of their violence.

Gender does not explain everything about family violence but any response to family violence needs to consider the gender differences in the perpetration, victimisation and consequences of violence.

Are women as violent as men?

By Dr Neville Robertson, University of Waikato

Many studies have shown that in the context of heterosexual relationships, women are as violent as men. These studies typically use measures such as the Conflict Tactics Scale, which ask respondents how often they have used specific acts of violence against their partners – and/or how often their partner has used those acts against them.

For example, here are some of the items.¹

- Threatened to hit or throw something at the other one.
- Threw or smashed or hit or kicked something.
- Threw something at the other one.
- Pushed, grabbed, or shoved the other one.
- Slapped the other one.
- Kicked, bit or hit with a fist.
- Hit or tried to hit with something.

The results are consistent. Women slap, push and hit their partners as often as men do. But is counting slaps and pushes and hits enough? Are all “slaps” equal? Is one person’s “push” pretty much the same as their partner’s “push”? Do all “hits” carry the same meaning?

This kind of approach to assessing violence has some serious deficiencies:

- It ignores the **context** of the violence. Women are more likely to use violence in self defence.
- It ignores the **impact** of the violence. Men’s violence is much more likely to result in serious injury.
- It ignores the **meaning** of the violence. Men’s violence is much more likely to result in intimidation and fear.

Many men in stopping violence programmes will report being hit by their partners. Mostly, they are probably telling the truth, at least part of it. But a useful question is “Are you afraid of her?” In my experience, the question is met with incredulity. “What? No, she is just a midget, a pesky fly. I can deal to her anytime I like.”

Ellen Pence of the Duluth Abuse Intervention Project explains the Conflict Tactics Scale this way. Imagine a man has his hands around his partner’s neck, choking her. She kicks him in the shins in an effort to get him to release his grip. On the Conflict Tactics Scale, they score one point each. Supposedly, they are equally violent. But who has the power? Who lives with the fear?

It is the fear engendered by men’s violence – or simply by the threat of violence - that gives abusive men power and control over their partner.

In this context, it is useful to make a distinction between **violence** and **battering**. According to one researcher, battering is ‘a systematic, continuing pattern of assaults, threatened assaults, intimidation and abuse which produces a dynamic of fear.’²

Are women as violent as men? A more complete answer is that yes, some women may be violent, but nearly all batterers are men.

REFERENCES

1. Straus, M.A. (1979). Measuring Intrafamily Conflict and Violence: The Conflict Tactics (CT) Scales. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 41, 75-88.
2. Jacobson, N.S. (1994). Response: Contextualism is dead: Long live contextualism. *Family Process*, 33, 97-100.