

## BATTERED MEN: THE HIDDEN SIDE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Often we tend to think of domestic violence as something that happens to women. Investigators at the Group Health Center for Health Studies, however, say domestic violence against men is "under-studied and often hidden".

In a study published in the June *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*, the researchers presented data which contradicts five commonly held misconceptions about domestic violence against men:

1. ***Few men experience domestic violence.*** The truth is that it is more common than believed. When 400 randomly sampled men were interviewed by phone, lead researcher Dr. Robert J. Reid and his colleagues found that 5% had experienced domestic violence in the previous year, 10% in the past five years and 29% at some time during their lifetime. Domestic violence was defined as both physical abuse (slapping, hitting, kicking or forced sex) and non-physical abuse (threats, constant disparaging remarks or controlling behavior).
2. ***Abuse of men has no serious effects.*** Even though women are more likely to be physically abused than men, the researchers found that men who were abused - even if the abuse was non-physical - suffered serious, long-term effects on their mental health. Depressive symptoms were nearly three times as common in older men who had experienced abuse than in those who had not.
3. ***Abused men don't stay with their abusers.*** Women, especially those who have children or are financially dependent upon their husbands, often stay in abusive relationships. The expectation held, however, is that men would be better able to leave their abusers. "We were surprised to find that most men in abusive relationships also stay, through multiple episodes, for years," said Dr. Reid.
4. ***Domestic violence only affects the poor.*** Not so, say the researchers. Their study showed that people from all walks of life are affected.
5. ***Ignoring it will make it go away.*** Ignoring a problem does not make it go away, however, many men are ashamed to speak out about abuse because of society's expectations that men are strong and in control. The researchers found that older men were less likely to speak out about their abuse than younger men.

In a press release, the researchers made it clear that they did not want to downplay violence against women. "Our team is concerned about abuse of people: of women as well as men," said Dr. Reid. In fact, the men who were interviewed were asked the same questions that had been asked of women in a previous study about domestic violence against women.

If you are a man or woman who has been abused by the significant other in your life, help is a phone call away. You can reach the National Domestic Violence Hotline toll-free at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233).

(Source: <http://depression.about.com/b/2008/05/20/battered-men-the-hidden-side-of-domestic-violence-2.htm?nl=1>)