

The Case for a Gendered Analysis of Violence Against Women

1. The Scottish Executive has adopted the following definition of domestic abuse to guide and inform the National Training Strategy on Violence Against Women:

Domestic abuse (as gender-based abuse), can be perpetrated by partners or ex- partners and can include physical abuse (assault and physical attack involving a range of behaviour), sexual abuse (acts which degrade and humiliate women and are perpetrated against their will, including rape) and mental and emotional abuse (such as threats, verbal abuse, racial abuse, withholding money and other types of controlling behaviour such as isolation from family and friends).

This places abuse in intimate relationships in a wider conceptual framework which locates violence and abuse within the gendered context of men's and women's lives, and which contends that domestic abuse can only be understood properly by acknowledging the continuum of violence against women and girls (in many forms and contexts) as a major global problem. The Executive is committed to a gendered analysis, and to policies which are informed by this theoretical perspective. But what are its principles, methods and arguments, and why has this approach been adopted? This paper will

- explain the terminology and rationale of gender analysis
- outline the gendered legacy, context, meanings and impact of domestic abuse, which show that abusive and controlling behaviour is mostly perpetrated by men against women
- consider the research which purports to demonstrate gender equivalence – that men are also likely to experience domestic abuse perpetrated by their female partner, and that women are just as violent as men in heterosexual relationships
- clarify how a gendered analysis accounts for violence and abuse by women against men, and for domestic abuse in same sex relationships
- outline the importance of locating our understanding, service responses, and efforts to eradicate domestic abuse within a larger framework which acknowledges gender inequality and the spectrum of gendered violence against women and children

2. What do we mean by 'gender'?

To say that domestic abuse is 'gender-based' does not mean that all perpetrators are male and all victims are female. It is vital to distinguish between *sex* and *gender*. *Sex* refers to the biological characteristics (anatomical and genetic) which distinguish the human species as male and female. These relate to the system of reproduction, but do not themselves determine the differences in non-reproductive roles, behaviours, status or qualities which are attributed in any given social context to women and men. Biological theories, or ideological belief systems which claim a dichotomy of natural, innate and immutable *social* distinction between *biological* male and female human beings are demonstrably

wrong: the evolutionary capacities which are human 'species characteristics' belong to both sexes, while differences between and within male and female human beings vary widely across time and place. The idea of two sharply differentiated sexes is largely a social creation, unsupported by any 'natural order'. It has required constant vigilance, coercion and persuasion for its historical maintenance and the concept of gender is at the heart of that project.

Gender refers to the array of **socially constructed roles, traits, attitudes, behaviours, values, responsibilities, relative power, status and influence** ascribed to male and female humans on a differential basis. Gender ascriptions (masculinity/femininity) are not biological, but learned. They are changeable over time, contested and vary widely within and across cultures. Gender refers not simply to women and/or men, but to the relationships between and among them, and to the social structures and mechanisms which affect our everyday lives. Gender identities condition the way human beings are perceived, and how they are expected to think and act. Women and men are made, not born.

3. A Gendered Analysis

Gender is a basic organising principle for relationships, institutions, cultures, and for the distribution of resources (including wealth, status and power) in human societies. Attribution of 'masculine' and 'feminine' characteristics is based on norms and values which are deeply woven into the fabric of our relationships, families, communities and societies. Human beings are socialised according to the array of gendered expectations and roles, which not only create and maintain *difference* between women and men, but also tend to assign unequal value and privilege to men and women. Historically, cultural traditions and dualistic belief systems have ascribed superior status to masculinity, and have developed diverse hierarchical gender orders which legitimise male authority and control over females and other subordinates. These have then been presented as the 'natural order', rooted in our biology, or in divine intention. Such gender orders and regimes intersect with those constructed around race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, disabilities and other aspects of identity in complex ways to foster and sustain *inequality*. A fundamental cross-cultural reality, both historically and in the present, has been the socially sanctioned use of violence, among other practices, as a means of social control to preserve male dominance. Despite considerable and continuing social change, gender remains the overriding context for all kinds of violence, including domestic abuse. It cannot be ignored or trivialised if we want to eradicate abuse and violence.

- *Gendered Analysis* offers a valuable conceptual tool: a framework for collecting, examining and interpreting information about the differences in women's and men's lives, experiences, behaviours, status, opportunities and limitations. It also investigates the social, economic, political and cultural structures and ideologies which serve to maintain or transform gender-based stereotypes, inequalities and abuses. A gendered analysis argues that the social phenomenon of domestic abuse can only properly be understood by considering its history, context, meanings, impact and consequences through the lens of gender. Unless we take seriously the ways in which sex difference has been used to systematize subordination, we cannot get to grips with the normalised possibility of violence and abuse in gender relations.

To say that domestic abuse is gender-based is simply to recognise that the socially attributed norms, roles and expectations of masculinity and femininity which affect intimate relationships and family structures are integral to the use and experience of violence and abuse, whether perpetrated by men or by women. The gendered social environment will affect prevalence, intention and consequences of abuse differentially, for men and women, and requires analysis. But the intersections of class, ethnicity, sexuality *et al*/will also impact on the experience and meaning of domestic abuse: it is neither a unitary nor a simple phenomenon, and our analysis must take account of complexity in a world of enduring gender inequality.

4. Why has the Scottish Executive adopted a gendered analysis of domestic abuse?

- It acknowledges the Western historical legacy, evident in Scottish social, religious and legal traditions, which accepted, justified and legalised the right of men to control and chastise their intimate partner and children, within a framework of mastery and possession.
- It comprehends that the use of physical and sexual violence has been extensively employed in human history to impose and consolidate men's control over women and children
- It recognises that the historical tolerance of men's violence against women (domestic and sexual, and in diverse arenas, including community, education and workplace) is still reinforced in many contexts and media representations, despite significant social and legal changes.
- It enables a contextualised and nuanced understanding of the dynamics, process and meanings of domestic abuse, recognised as a purposeful pattern of behaviours, rather than a series of incidents/acts
- It focuses responsibility and accountability clearly upon the perpetrator who chooses to utilise abusive behaviours in order to assert power and control, usually to gain authority over and services from his partner
- It was gendered analysis by grassroots feminist movements which first named and identified domestic abuse as a major social problem. Without that critical perspective, centuries of men's violence and abuse against women and children had been hidden or normalised as acceptable in the context of family relationships
- It is supported by an extensive and ever-growing body of national and international evidence based on sophisticated theoretical and empirical research across many disciplines
- It informs the discourse and consensus of international organisations, including the United Nations General Assembly, the World Health Organisation, UNICEF and Amnesty International. The UN General Assembly declared in 1993 that 'Violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men, and the prevention of the full advancement of women; and that violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men', while Secretary General Kofi Annan observed in 1999: 'Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation, and it perhaps the most pervasive. It knows no boundaries of geography, culture or wealth. As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development and peace'.

- It enables us to see and to name the problem, to direct our thinking and to inform a vision for transformation, at all levels of social interaction, from dominant to egalitarian masculinity, for the benefit of women, children and men, and the wellbeing of our communities

A gendered analysis recognizes

- that violence is endemic and functional within human interactions and structures. There are many expressions of violence which are considered normal, legitimate and even honourable
- that violent practices and behaviours - from interpersonal to international levels, in families, communities and in wars - are gendered
- that men are statistically and overwhelmingly the main perpetrators of violence (especially severe and injurious violence) against other men and against women
- but that by no means all men are violent or abusive
- that some women use violent and abusive behaviours
- that the meaning, use and consequences of violence by men and by women is not equivalent and cannot be understood in isolation, but as an expression (and sometimes subversion) of wider social factors
- that the key to understanding the differences between men's and women's violence lies in an examination of the context within which violence is perpetrated

6. The gendered context

In Scotland, as elsewhere in the West, there is a potent legacy of beliefs, attitudes and practices which traditionally constructed society according to a hierarchy of value. This associated masculinity with mastery and control, and femininity with submission and service. These dualistic social norms were 'institutionalised in the structure of the patriarchal family, and...supported by economic and political institutions, and by a belief system, including a religious one, that [made] such relationships seem natural, morally just, sacred.' (Dobash and Dobash 1979).

The patriarchal ideology of mastery is rooted in assumptions of relative value and worth: of superiority and inferiority. In practical terms, the perspective of the master is of his own intrinsic worth, so that he expects that his needs and desires should be met by those whose designated role is to serve him. Women, servants, slaves, children, animals and the resources of the earth are regarded primarily of instrumental, not intrinsic value. Their own needs are of secondary importance, and do not require to be considered if they are at odds with those of the master. His superiority entitles him to expect services and conformity to his will and defines his wife, children, servants and subjects as 'good' to the extent that they provide his entitlements and obey his commands. This colonising logic has deeply influenced human structures from families to imperialist projects. (Plumwood 1993) At its heart is the construction of masculine privilege around notions of entitlement, exploitation and control. Within this gender order, the value and role of women – especially as wives and mothers - has traditionally been characterised as primarily to satisfy the needs, requirements and expectations of others. The legal and economic basis for the institution of marriage and paternity, until quite recently, reflected and enforced the norms of male authority, entitlement and even possession. These sanctioned norms included the right of men to constrain and chastise their wives if they were

'insubordinate', and also their absolute legal right to sexual servicing, until the very recent legislation to recognise the possibility of rape within marriage. In all social contexts of inequality, including intimate relationships, physical force/violence (and the threat of such violence) has been a resource used to impose or reinforce power. It may not always be necessary actually to engage in violent acts, if other mechanisms of power are available and effective. But in family life, as in colonization or national/State aggrandizement, such acts have been justified to maintain dominance and privilege.

The dominant ideology of mastery and male privilege has, of course, long been subject to considerable resistance and modification, as some excellent recent work by historians of gender relations in Scotland demonstrates. Since the 1960s, the pace of social and legal change has accelerated, and alternative discourses of gender relations based on equality, mutuality, respect and choice have challenged the rigidity of stereotypes about the roles and expectations of women and men in intimate relationships. Most women are economically active, and men have become more involved in childcare and domestic chores. Nevertheless, both family responsibilities and paid employment continue to be heavily gendered: overall women are paid less, for lower status and part-time jobs, and have significantly smaller pensions. It is far more common for women to be economically dependent on their male partners than *vice versa*. Likewise, the division of labour within households is still far from being gender equivalent: the norm and the expectation remains that women have primary responsibility for childcare and domestic chores. Recent research suggests that there is a disjunction between the rhetoric of equality and sharing used by many couples, and the everyday reality of their experiences (Jones 2005). Notions of male entitlement – especially around provision of domestic and sexual services – remain surprisingly widespread and resilient. Such ideas receive powerful cultural support, not least from the huge and proliferating global commercial exploitation of women in pornography and prostitution, and for domestic labour or 'mail order brides'.

Much of the gendered meaning of social life is hard to measure because it remains so deeply ingrained into the identities and lives of women and men. Despite significant changes, girls and boys, women and men experience very different patterns of socialization from the beginning of their lives, and this impacts upon expectations for themselves and for their partners, as they form and develop relationships. Gendered characteristics of intimate relationships and of family life influence how women and men think about violence and abuse, and the possibilities for ending or leaving such abuse.

7. Domestic abuse as gender-based abuse: coercive control

Our definition of domestic abuse is careful to focus, not on particular *acts* or *incidents* as constitutive of such abuse, but rather on the *intent* and the *impact* of conduct perpetrated by partners or ex-partners. It recognizes that physical, sexual, mental and emotional abuse are included in a range of tactics and behaviours which function to exercise coercive control over the partner. Physical aggression and threats are among the strategies available to intimidate, humiliate, isolate, exhaust, disable, punish and reward the partner in order to demonstrate power. This characteristic pattern of behaviour has been described by leading researchers in the field as a 'constellation of abuse' (Dobash and Dobash 2004) and as 'intimate terrorism' (Johnson 1995). The typical strategies employed bear many resemblances

to those utilized by terrorists, hostage-takers and in concentration camps. The harmful and often severely traumatising consequences for those who are victimized are likewise similar (Herman 1992). Although incidents of physical assault may be the most readily identified as criminal behaviour, it is crucial that we do not measure or assess such incidents without taking into account the *context* in which they have been committed. Considerable confusion has arisen, both in academic debate and also in the domains of public policy and opinion, when acts of physical aggression and force have been tallied, and taken in isolation, to constitute 'domestic violence'. (For example, the Scottish Crime Survey, in common with other large-scale random samples of populations, focuses on incidents of physical threats and force). A leading researcher has recently called for a radical reframing of domestic violence to account for the realities of women's experience of entrapment and subjugation by male partners. Evan Stark argues the key to understanding most abuse is not physical assault, but coercion and control, which 'jeopardises individual liberty and autonomy as well as safety', and is centred on 'the micro-regulation of women's default roles as wife, mother, homemaker and sexual partner' (Stark 2007). He maintains that this strategy has been adopted by many men in societies (like Scotland) where the traditional norms and regulations of patriarchy are under challenge by changing laws and moves towards formal equality. Where women's lives are socially circumscribed by religious, cultural, political and economic inequality, individual men who seek domination may have less need to regulate their wife's behaviour and access to resources, because men's control and entitlement, and restrictions on women, are enshrined and supported beyond the interpersonal domain. Stark's conclusion is that domestic abuse as coercive control is primarily a liberty crime rather than a crime of assault, because it results in gender-specific infringements: appropriation of resources, subversion of rights to self-respect and autonomy, and prevents women from freely exercising their social, economic and political agency,

If women's attainment of formal equality leads men who wish to dominate them to construct what amounts to a patriarchy in miniature in individual relationships, they can only succeed because men can exploit persistent inequalities, such as the huge difference between men's and women's earnings. Thus coercive control is personal because it is constructed in personal life; but it could not exist if women enjoyed full equality. [Coercive control] depends on sexual inequality and focuses on the imposition of stereotype sex roles.

Evan Stark (2007)

It should be noted that the SE definition does not actually use the word 'violence'. It is rooted in a human rights perspective, not a calculation or tally of physical assault committed by one partner against another.

Research over more than thirty years from around the world clearly indicates that domestic abuse as understood and defined by the Scottish Executive is primarily, and overwhelmingly, perpetrated by men against a female partner or ex-partner. It is therefore a gender issue. This imbalance requires explanation rooted in analysis which posits, not that men are biologically and irredeemably 'hard-wired' for coercive controlling behaviour (for it is evident, despite the unacceptable levels of domestic abuse, that most individual men in Scotland choose to eschew abuse and violence),

but that we must examine links between the individual behaviour of some men, and prevailing social/structural conditions. This approach acknowledges that women also have the potential for violent behaviour, but that gendered norms reduce the capacity, context and likelihood that such behaviour is either intended or successful as a tactic of coercive control.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to present a full consideration of these issues. But it may be helpful simply to note some of the ways in which gender helps to highlight and explain the statistical prevalence of men's (often violent) abuse of their partners:

1. There is often a physical difference in size and strength which generally makes men's use of violence more effective as a means of control
2. Strong gender socialization (in childhood play, certain sports, ideals of strength and courage, peer groups, gangs, media role models, military) has associated the use of physical force and violence with masculinity. Indeed, in a variety of contexts men are actively socialized to enjoy inflicting violence. This makes the threat of physical violence more likely and more credible from men
3. The complex but deep-rooted connection between sexual pleasure, coercion and men's violence (associated with notions of mastery and entitlement) makes intimate sexual relations a fruitful arena for abuse
4. Individual misogyny, and general hostility to women, have been implicated (Holzworth-Munro et al 2000), while men with traditionalist views about sharply differentiated gender roles and status may also be more likely to perpetrate domestic abuse (Sugarman and Frankel 1996). Even where such views are not overtly present, their continued widespread dissemination, despite 'official' commitments to gender equality, provide a reinforcing context for traditional male expectations and demands in heterosexual relationships
5. The generally prevailing social norms about such relationships remain heavily gendered (though contested and continually changing) and rooted in masculine power. No individual relationship remains unaffected by these norms, regardless of personal attitudes. These also influence social opinions about the responsibility within, and break-up of, a relationship, and contribute to the entrapment of women. Likewise, the lack of peer challenge means, in effect, that abusive men 'get away with it'
6. The predominant cultures of masculinity and femininity ensure that the meaning of violence will differ when used by women against male partners – it may be subject to particular censure because it subverts assumptions about 'acceptable' female behaviour. But it is also usually taken less seriously (by the target), is less likely to cause serious injury, rarely results in increased fear or constraints in behaviour/movement of the partner (Dobash and Dobash 2004, Swan 2005). The use of violence by women is therefore much less likely to

be aimed or effective at establishing power and control over their partners. Research studies which have investigated cohorts of female offenders apprehended for domestic violence offences have concluded that such violence almost always occurred in the context of violence against them committed by their male partners, and is best characterized as violent resistance, self-defence, attempts to flee or to protect children. (Johnson 1995, Swan 2005, Miller and Meloy 2006)

7. The gendering of the broader social, communal and economic context affects the resources and agencies available to help individuals cope with and/or escape a coercive controlling partner. The criminal justice system has traditionally been heavily male dominated with a strong 'masculine' ethos. Other agencies and networks, and public discourses, have also presented obstacles to women's ability to resist or end the social entrapment of domestic abuse. Even the gender regimes of families and community networks may collude with the internalised shame of women who experience abuse by disbelieving or blaming them. Victim-blaming misconceptions based on stereotypes of women's roles/characteristics have widespread cultural influence, and have also served to deflect attention from the fundamental problem: the ways in which male socialization and behaviours lead to danger, violation, limits on space for action and loss of human rights for so many women.

Having outlined the gendered contexts of domestic abuse, it is important to acknowledge that there have been major and significant changes (especially since the 1970s) in the wider socio-political context. The women's movement, medical and legal developments, international human rights discourse, shifts in mainstream religious and cultural understandings of gender relations and roles, the advent of the Scottish Parliament: these and other factors have impacted positively on awareness, debate and service provision. The growing body of evidence from research and practice supports the explanatory value of gendered theoretical perspectives within and across relevant disciplines. In Scotland and worldwide, the experience of policy-makers, police, health and social service agencies, Women's Aid and other advocates confirms that domestic abuse as 'intimate terrorism' is overwhelmingly an issue of male coercive control of a female partner. Provision and legislation reflect that reality. A supposedly gender-neutral approach (such as that implied by the current Home Office definition which shapes policy in England and Wales) is both counter-intuitive and contradictory. But the gendered perspective has been disputed by an approach (family conflict/violence) which claims to find evidence for gender symmetry and equivalence in the use of violence within intimate partner relationships. In acrimonious academic and popular debates, the cry goes up, 'but what about violence against men'?

8. Gender Symmetry and Women's Violence to Men

The main source of challenge to the feminist-structural analysis of domestic abuse has come from the theoretical framework of the *family conflict* approach and is largely based on data produced by a quantitative research instrument called the *Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS)* associated with Straus and Gelles and the New Hampshire School, but extensively utilized in over 100 empirical studies which have

consistently concluded that women are equally likely to use and to initiate violence in relationships. How do these hypotheses square with the view that domestic abuse is mostly perpetrated by men?

This raises a fundamental theoretical question: how is domestic abuse/violence defined, conceptualized and measured? This is at once a methodological and a political issue.

The CTS is commonly used to study large representative population samples, and is a checklist which asks respondents whether or not they/their partners have used or been the recipient of specific violent acts such as 'slap', 'push', 'shove' (classified as minor) or such as 'kick', 'throw something' or 'choke' (classified as severe or abusive). It tallies acts of force or physical violence without any contextualization or consideration of impact. In its earlier forms, the CTS also excluded any record of sexual assault or coercion. There are serious methodological weaknesses in the design and administration of the CTS:

- The bias of non-response. Up to 40% of those contacted at random refuse to participate. Researchers agree that will include perpetrators of coercive controlling behaviour, and also those victimized by such behaviour. Women who experience extreme abuse are unlikely to agree to participate in general surveys about violence (Waltermauer, Ortega and McNutt, 2003). So research based on such sampling methods will underestimate the amount of extreme violence experienced by women, and committed by men.
- The gendered bias of self-reporting. Men tend to underestimate their own use of violence, while in responding to surveys women are also likely to underestimate men's use of violence (but note that qualitative methods which are based on a relationship of trust are more likely to elicit fuller responses from women about the extent and severity of their partner's abuse). Both men and women tend also to over-report women's use of violence (Kimmel 2002; Dobash and Dobash 2004)
- The exclusion of non-cohabiting couples from most CTS samples misses violence by *former* partners. As the SE definition recognizes, ending a relationship does not always end the abuse, but instead is a time of increased danger for severe violence or murder (including family wipe-outs)
- The CTS provides no mechanism for measuring the relative severity, injury caused, or impact of violent acts. Yet women are six to ten times more likely to sustain serious injury and have significantly higher probability of developing depression, anxiety, PTSD and substance misuse as a result of domestic abuse. One study found that for every man hospitalized, there are 46 women (Straton 1994).
- Even if such biases and methodological problems could be corrected, statistics are meaningless unless understood in relation to the meanings, contexts and consequences of violence.
- The CTS introduces its questions by framing issues of violence within assumptions of 'conflict' or disagreement within notionally equal relationships, but does not acknowledge the dynamics of power and control.

The CTS methodology has been widely and extensively critiqued by many scholars for its failure to address gendered realities, and for avoiding any examination of underlying structures of male privilege (Kimmel 2002, Dobash & Dobash 2004, Loseke and Kurz 2005 et al). A methodologically sound contextual assessment of

'family violence' would take account of the 'constellation of abuse'. Kimmel (2002) contends that the CTS is a useful tool for measuring the 'expressive' and quite commonplace violence of anger, frustration and interpersonal conflict, but that it cannot capture the complex reality of 'intentional' or instrumental violence, which is one tactic utilized as part of a fear-based system of domination, rather than an outcome of conflict or anger.

Johnson (1995, 2006) has argued that seemingly contradictory research findings arise from a conflation of fundamentally different understandings of violence in intimate relationships, and that major sources of data (CTS surveys on one hand, and evidence from agencies and shelters(refuges) on the other) tap different kinds of violence. He describes three main types of intimate partner violence:

- *Situational Couple Violence* occurs when a disagreement that turns into an angry argument escalates into violence, which can be mild or severe. It may be an isolated incident, or there can be a recurring pattern. As implied, the violence is situational, but is not used as part of a general process of coercive control. Although women and men may both be perpetrators, men usually do more serious damage, and their violence is more likely to introduce fear into a relationship. Even if not starkly gendered as the intimate terrorism which mostly connects power and control with notions of male entitlement, it has differential impacts and meanings for women and men.
- *Intimate Terrorism* is when the perpetrator uses violence in combination with other control tactics to assert coercive power and privilege. In heterosexual relationships, intimate terrorism almost always involves a man terrorizing a woman. This is the kind of abuse which is most often reported to law enforcement and agencies providing refuge or support
- *Violent Resistance* is the violence sometimes used when a victim of intimate terrorism fights back, in an attempt physically to resist domination by abusive men. It is often transitory, but occasionally extreme (eg homicide as a last resort)

Johnson contends that the major social concern is about 'intimate terrorism', but that all too often the data used to inform discussions and policy about 'domestic violence' comes from general surveys, based on the CTS, which largely measure situational couple violence, not domestic abuse. This category confusion leads to the erroneous claim that there as many 'battered husbands' as abused wives. To maintain the distinction between these types of violence in relationships is not to trivialize the dangers and problems of 'situational couple violence' for both women and men. However, it does clarify a confusion which has hindered advocates, service providers and public understanding/debate of the issues.

Qualitative and discursive research to explore the complex experiences and meanings of violence used by men and women provides some helpful counters to the facile claims of gender symmetry and equivalence. Dobash and Dobash (2004) studied 95 couples in Scotland with men and women reporting separately on violence in their relationship. They conclude that women's use of violence differs in nature, frequency, intention, intensity, injury and emotional impact. Men reported women's violence as 'inconsequential' which did not affect their wellbeing or safety. Swan's research into violent women (2005) found that moderate physical violence and

emotional abuse were comparable between men and women, but that severe physical violence, injury, sexual coercion, and other controlling behaviours were mostly committed by men. Most female violence was reactive and driven by defensive motives. She concludes that male violence against women is a strong predictor of women's violence, and that in order to challenge both male and female violence, traditional gender attitudes and roles must be targeted.

In a fluid and changing social context, the constructions of masculine and feminine identity are complex. Women have historically had little social power, but in situations where that state of affairs changes, there is clearly the possibility and potential for such power to be abused. Physical violence and other coercive tactics may be, and on occasion are, practiced by women seeking control. But the significance, contexts and social response to such behaviours will nonetheless remain gendered. Women's violence and abuse against men should neither be ignored nor condoned. But it is wrong to suggest that it is equivalent, either in prevalence or impact. It is vital to base research, policy and practice on a thorough understanding of the gendered dynamics of power, control and entitlement in relationships between men and women.

Domestic abuse in same sex relationships

Domestic abuse occurs in same sex relationships, with some research suggesting it is as prevalent as that experienced by women in heterosexual relationships. It is, however, an issue that has often been overlooked, made invisible. The time is right for this serious issue to take its place in consideration of Scottish policy and practice. In the context of the Scottish Executive strategy and the adopted definition of domestic abuse, it is important to clarify the extent to which a gender analysis is appropriate and useful for understanding domestic abuse in same sex relationships.

Is lesbian [and gay] violence a problem the very existence of which disproves the existence of patriarchy, or a subcultural one within which heterosexuality still provides the dominant model?

Scott

Most of the behaviour associated with gender is learned rather than innate. People learn behaviour and construct identities in relation to what is regarded in their cultural context as appropriate for *masculinity* or *femininity*. Men are not determined, biologically, to be 'hard-wired' to engage in aggression, violence and abuse. Women are not inevitably programmed for passivity and victimisation.

While masculinity and femininity may be defined and performed differently by various groups in society, for example according to ethnicity or sexual orientation, these are often compared to and contrasted unfavourably with the dominant culture of masculinity or femininity, so a gay man may be described as *not a real man*. This too has been misleading, and brings us to our second myth, a belief that gay men, as more *feminine* (ie more sensitive and caring) than other men are less likely to abuse a partner.

These are myths that abusers can hide behind and that can act as a major barrier to those experiencing abuse disclosing or seeking assistance.

Heterosexuality and Same Sex Domestic Abuse.

Much has been written about how marginalised same sex relationships are in public consciousness. Gender theorists contend that heterosexuality is more than a sexual relationship between a man and a women, but is 'institutionalised as the privileged normative form of sexuality' (Jackson). Institutionalised heterosexuality has traditionally been utilised to control and sanction those, including gay men and lesbians, whose behaviours and relationships are considered to transgress the heterosexual norm; but it can also be used by abusers in same sex relationships.

The social and cultural dominance of heterosexuality can impact on same sex domestic abuse in the following ways:

- Its very pervasiveness facilitates the hiddenness and 'difference' of gay/lesbian relationships, so that an abuser may convince a partner that what is happening is 'normal' in non-heterosexual behaviour, and that (s)he does not understand gay/lesbian relationships.
- Abuse may be increased and hidden by portraying the violence as mutual or consensual.
- Within gay relationships it may be characterised not as domestic abuse but as a reflection or expression of masculinity.
- Public and media representations of heterosexual relationships may isolate homosexual people, because they do not see their own lives and relationships reflected
- Individuals and relationships may become idealized: notions of the 'egalitarian' lesbian relationship and the 'more evolved' gay man notions may isolate those who experience a very different reality in their relationship.
- Gay and lesbian people are influenced and shaped by the examples, narratives and images of heterosexual relationships which surround them. There may be tension between the familiarity and safety of these patterns, which are simultaneously unrelated to their own way of life. This provides the context for the struggle to construct or redefine the relationship. This point should not be confused with the misconception that gay and lesbian people commit abuse because of the stress of living in a homophobic and heterosexist world.

First same sex relationships have been identified as sites of particularly high risk, with 'lack of confidence in what behaviours are acceptable in intimate same sex relationships' as an important factor (Ristock, Hester et al).

Homophobia and Same Sex Domestic Abuse

Homophobia is an integral reality of life for lesbians and gay men, not an addition to it. Consideration of homophobia in the context of domestic abuse requires attention to both externalized and internalized forms and impacts. These include:

- The threat of outing a partner to friends, family, employer, the wider community.
- The control of a partner's expression of their sexuality due to the abuser's own desire not to be 'out'.
- Stating that no-one will help the abused partner as the police, justice system etc are homophobic.
- Stating that the abuse is deserved because (s)he is homosexual.

- Stating that (s)he is not a *real* homosexual because of the sex of previous partners or preference/dislike of certain sexual practices.
- For gay men it can also include the amplification of *masculine norms* as a result of internalized homophobia. This can similarly be argued where two lesbians take on butch/femme identities.

Homophobia also impacts on gay and lesbian people's experiences of domestic abuse by placing additional barriers to accessing support. This can come about by:

- A feeling of betraying an already besieged community.
- Fear of exposing a partner to a homophobic justice system.
- Fear of being ridiculed by support agencies because of their sexual orientation.
- Risk of alienation from the gay and lesbian community.
- Fear that the abuse will not be taken seriously, or will be down-played as 'just an argument' or mutual violence.
- The concern that domestic abuse is seen as a heterosexual issue.
- In response to the homophobia they face, lesbians may have placed great importance in building an image of a community which offers an egalitarian alternative to the tradition heterosexual pattern of hierarchical relationships. They may feel anxious and constrained to conceal anything which undermines that image.
- Gay men may also construct an idealized image of themselves as *more evolved* than other men and therefore less likely to use violence. The contradiction between ideal and reality, and the concern not to jeopardise a community which already suffers homophobic prejudice and discrimination, might be a silencing factor

The question arises whether it is right to focus on domestic abuse, or to consider such abuse within the continuum of domestic, family and community based abuse faced by lesbians and gay men which includes domestic abuse, rape and sexual assault, abuse by family members and others on account of an individual's sexual orientation). If our purpose is to understand of the dynamics of the abuse experienced in same sex relationships to enable the development of effective and sensitive interventions, then it can be argued that focusing solely on domestic abuse may be a lost opportunity. It is part of the general purpose of this paper to challenge any strategic approach which deals exclusively with domestic abuse, separate from the theoretical and policy context of all forms of men's violence against women. Furthermore, focus on the full continuum of abuse may in itself further distinguish the features and dynamics that are specific within same sex relationships.

The Continuum of Violence Against Women

'Violence against women is not the result of random, individual acts of misconduct, but rather is deeply rooted in structural relationships of inequality between women and men...Violence constitutes a continuum across the lifespan of women, from before birth to old age. It cuts across both the public and the private spheres' (*Ending Violence Against Women: from Words to Action, UN Secretary General's Report 2006*)

Domestic abuse is not simply a private matter, but occurs in the broad context of social, economic and cultural norms which reflect and reinforce inequalities between men and women. The gendered character of interpersonal power, relationships and domestic arrangements (including the perpetration of domestic abuse) does not develop in a vacuum. Global disparities of power, freedom of movement, opportunities and access to resources continue to discriminate against girls and women. Compelling evidence from around the world demonstrates that violence against women is severe and pervasive. It takes many forms, and is experienced in diverse domains or settings, including home/family; community; workplace or education; leisure and media; religious and political institutions; State-sponsored violence; war and conflict; migration and globalization.

Imagine a people routinely subjected to assault, rape, sexual slavery, arbitrary imprisonment, torture, verbal abuse, mutilation, even murder—all because they were born into a particular group. Imagine further that their sufferings were compounded by systematic discrimination and humiliation in the home and workplace, in classrooms and courtrooms, at worship and at play. Few would deny that this group had been singled out for gross violations of human rights.

Such a group exists. Its members comprise half of humanity. Yet it is rarely acknowledged that violence against women and girls, many of whom are brutalized from cradle to grave simply because of their gender, is the most pervasive human rights violation in the world today.

The Intolerable Status Quo: Violence Against Women and Girls
UNICEF 1997

Thirty years of disclosure, grassroots work, advocacy, research and campaigning has challenged the international community, working through the United Nations and other agencies, to establish violence against women as a human rights issue on the international agenda. This has been recognised as a vital public concern – not just for the rights and equality of individual women, but for the wellbeing of societies and for advancement towards global development and peace. There has been significant progress in developing international standards and norms. International and regional legal and policy instruments have clarified the obligations on States to prevent, eradicate and punish violence against women. However, political action and resources to meet the requirements of those frameworks has been inadequate.

It is vital to locate domestic abuse within a wider framework, acknowledging the continuum of gender based violence against women. There are at least four major reasons for doing so:

- A comprehensive understanding of the roots, causes, meaning and consequences of domestic abuse is not possible if the issue is considered as a discrete 'family problem' separate from the broad cross-cultural realities of male privilege and female inequality.

- Policy and service responses which focus only on domestic abuse fail to account for the complex experiences of women's victimization by the same and/or by different perpetrators of violence in different contexts (eg child sexual abuse, domestic abuse, homelessness, prostitution, assault by strangers). A narrow focus may not recognize that attempts to cope with or to escape one form of abuse can make women vulnerable to others. (For example, a young woman fleeing an abusive father or husband may develop mental health problems, addictions, and/or become homeless. All of these factors will put her at increased risk of sexual exploitation. If she is from a non-Western country and decides to migrate to the UK to seek work, she may be trafficked or otherwise drawn into prostitution). Cumulative, complex and interlinked experiences of harm, violation and abuse in individual women's lives are by no means exceptional. Lack of knowledge, coordination and confidence to recognize and respond across traditional sector/service boundaries remains a major impediment to effective, respectful responses which will actually help achieve safety, empowerment, justice, dignity and wellbeing.
- An integrated framework which recognizes that domestic abuse as intimate terrorism is a major violation of women's human rights and liberties – both a cause and a consequence of discrimination – takes seriously the statutory and community obligation not only to provide appropriate support services, but also to address the root causes and social legitimizations of such violation.
- Strong public recognition that the domestic domain is only one among the many contexts where women's lives, opportunities and rights may be constrained, threatened and harmed by men, will ensure that attention is paid to the violent behaviours and culpability of individual men. But it will also prioritize the need to address the problematic social attitudes, structures and constructions of masculinity which normalize and tolerate gender based inequality in any domain of human interaction. And it will not resort to stereotyping the 'typical' or 'dysfunctional' perpetrators and victims of abuse, as separate from 'normal' people, but will recognize societal responsibility for an everyday reality which impinges on and harms the lives of all of us to a greater or lesser extent.

Violence Against Women – Mapping the Connections

The concept of a continuum of violence against women was developed by Liz Kelly (a leading scholar in this field) in *Surviving Sexual Violence* (1988). Her concern was to change the standard approach from analyzing VAW as episodic and deviant incidents of extreme cruelty and harm, to recognizing that it is *normative* and *functional*: an everyday context for the lives and experiences of women and girls all over the world. She argues that isolated concentration on manifestations of severe, horrifying and excessive violence against women leads investigators to seek explanations in individual pathology and abnormality (of perpetrator and/or victim). This approach distances the acts and their motivations from the structures and norms of 'acceptability', 'decency' and 'respectable society'. Kelly claims, rather, that aberrant forms of VAW are extremes at one end of a broad spectrum of socially sanctioned male aggression, coercive behaviour, notions of male entitlement and deep-rooted patriarchal

norms. So, for example, 'stranger' rape is the extreme end of a spectrum of sexist jokes, sexual harassment, intimate intrusions, coercive sex with dates or partners. These are all included in the everyday experiences of women and girls, and for which there is widespread tolerance. (Eg Zero Tolerance research has found that up to 1 in 2 young men and 1 in 3 young women believe that forced sex is justifiable in certain circumstances). While traditional cultural practices such as female genital cutting, foot-binding and so-called honour killings are condemned by white Westerners as barbaric, socially acceptable Western cultural practices – including norms and body rituals of emphasized femininity - may also be construed as controlling, manipulating or exploiting women. And most women order their daily lives around the restrictions to safety and freedom of movement which the background threat of men's violence imposes. The idea of a continuum should not be taken to mean that there is a hierarchy of seriousness or severity based on physical force/harm, but instead reflects the continuum of complex and interlinked experiences of harassment, violation, abuse, constraint for individual women, and operational to a greater or lesser extent as social, legal and cultural sanctions. These prevailing realities and the implicit threats they carry to safety, autonomy and wellbeing, have the effect of limiting women's capacity or space for action (Lundgren), and hence violate human rights.

'Typical' and 'aberrant' violence and abuses shade into one another along the spectrum, without clear demarcation. This is characteristic of many women's experience of domestic abuse, where a partner who seems initially charming, protective and loving may imperceptibly become possessive, demanding, jealous and controlling, using a range of strategies which may or may not include physical violence, but which have the effect of frightening, isolating and constraining the woman's capacity for action, and of extracting those services to which the man feels he is entitled.

Research, policy and practice has tended to categorise and investigate diverse 'events' and settings of gender based violence (domestic abuse, rape and sexual assault, child abuse, culturally sanctioned harmful practices, commercial sexual exploitation) in distinct 'silos'; but it is vital to recognize their *commonalities* in terms of function, impact and consequences. Domestic abuse, harmful cultural practices, sexual harassment and assault, child incest, forced marriage, economic and structural discrimination, internet porn, stalking, trafficking for sexual or domestic labour, abuse of women and girls in conflict zones or refugee contexts: these are all instrumental forms of coercion, constraint and abuse. They function to control and limit the status, movement, integrity, opportunities and rights of women, and to facilitate privilege and entitlement. In Scotland, most men may not choose to perpetrate violence or abuse against women they encounter. Most men may genuinely recoil from the excesses of domestic and sexual violence, and sympathise with women who experience it (though few are motivated to engage in active opposition to gender based abuse). But even the 'good guys' are beneficiaries of systematic and cultural masculine privilege which confers everyday freedom of movement, status and opportunities less straightforwardly available to women and girls.

'In spite of significant social changes in recent decades, men continue to grow up with, and are socialized into, a deeply misogynistic male-dominated culture, where violence against women – from the subtle to the homicidal – is disturbingly common. It's *normal*. And precisely because the mistreatment of women is such a pervasive characteristic of our culture, most men, to a greater or lesser extent, have played a role in its perpetuation. This gives us a strong incentive to avert our eyes.'

Jackson Katz (2006)

Regardless of the setting or context of VAW, the impacts and consequences for women are remarkably consistent across the continuum. For millions, these consequences are serious, cumulative and long term:

- Threats and harm to safety
- Limits on 'space for action' (Lundgren), agency, capacity
- Physical harm, injury, disability, infection, illness, death
- Psychological harm – anxiety, depression, stress, trauma
- Betrayal and sometimes destruction of self-worth, esteem, ability to trust
- Dishonour, shame, disgrace, stigmatization, ostracism (cultural, religious, social)
- Impact on earning power, achievements, livelihood, ability to recognize or fulfil potential, place in society, status

Women who experience violence in different contexts may variously be characterized and responded to as victims, casualties, survivors; they may also be perpetrators and colluders with violence and abuse.

Intersections and differences

While the continuum model enables an understanding of the commonalities and functionality of VAW, it is vital also for an explanatory framework to account for the distinctiveness and differences which shape the context and consequences of violence in real lives, and in diverse circumstances. It is neither true nor helpful to suggest that domestic abuse, or other forms of VAW, affect all women equally regardless of race, class, disability, religion, sexual orientation, community, location, economic or educational resources. 'The tag line that domestic violence affects everyone equally trivializes both the dimensions that underlie the experiences of these particular abuse victims and more important, the ways we analyse the prevalence and impact of violence against them'. (Sokoloff & Dupont 2005). Individual women and social structures are affected in particular ways by the intersections of oppressions and circumstances. These operate not just as an accumulation of discriminations, but each interacts with the others to constitute multidimensional and complex situations. Experiences and meanings of violation are mediated and compounded through other sources of discrimination and inequality, including racism, poverty, age, cultural imperialism and disability. So, for example, Razack (1998) cautions, 'violence [against women] in immigrant communities is viewed as a cultural attribute rather than the product of male domination that is inextricably bound up with racism'.

An intersectional approach takes seriously the need to research and give voice to stories and experiences of VAW from diverse perspectives. Only in this way will it be possible to represent and address particular needs arising from all the different strands which constitute the full picture of real lives. A gender analysis is necessary, but not sufficient, to account for all the elements and risk factors which contribute to inequalities and violations in the lives of diverse women. These present considerable and urgent challenges for service providers and policy makers:

- Forms of VAW are separated in law, research, government departments and service provision, but are intertwined in women's experiences
- Disjointed thinking and working are major obstacles to effective and appropriate responses to need. Practitioners and organizations must be able to understand these connections and to make links within and across traditional boundaries
- Women and girls in particular groups may be targeted or vulnerable to violence and abuse, and have limited resources to resist or to support themselves
- For example, those in residential care, with social, physical or mental health vulnerabilities live in a context of statistically high rates of abuse
- Women migrants and asylum seekers may have added problems because they have uncertain status, language difficulties, no knowledge of their rights, suffer prejudice and stereotyping, have a personal legacy of abuse and fear of authority
- Those who have experience of serious victimization at the hands of men are disproportionately represented in custody, with criminal convictions and/or severe mental health/substance misuse problems
- The strong correlation between domestic abuse and child sexual abuse is attested in research literature, but has not yet resulted in an integrated policy or provision framework.

A consistent gender analysis lies at the heart of making sense of the theoretical and practical connections between VAW in and across many contexts.

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