Abused Men in Scotland (AMIS) is a small Scottish charity with two staff. It receives no government funding. The AMIS helpline has been providing telephone support since 2010 for men (including GBTI and anyone else who does not identify as a woman) in Scotland who experience domestic abuse.

In 2014 this support was extended to provide telephone advocacy and casework across Scotland as well as a face to face advocacy service for men in the Edinburgh area and safe accommodation in Central Scotland. To our knowledge these are the only specialist support services providing on-going and face to face assistance for men in Scotland who need such support. Over the past year 287 men called the helpline and 144 received ongoing support.

It was previously thought that men experiencing abuse needed no more than an anonymous helpline. Hundreds of men have expressed appreciation for the opportunity to talk to somebody who understands what they are going through. However, many men do need on-going support as they try to find safety for themselves and their children and try to rebuild their lives. Calls have been increasing steadily over the years and the face to face service runs at capacity.

AMIS takes a gender inclusive approach to domestic abuse. That is to say we recognise some aspects that impact people differently along gender lines though we find that all types of domestic abuse - psychological, emotional, sexual, financial, and physical violence etc. can affect anyone regardless of sex/gender and abuser/abused. AMIS’s review of research (Dempsey, 2013)\(^1\) provides a useful overview of relevant research and we hope to publish an update in the near future.

We wish to focus our evidence on men’s experience of domestic abuse which tends to be afforded little attention in the prevailing public narrative and in service provision. This can marginalise the prevalence and seriousness of men’s experience and that of their children. We present some examples below. We cannot stress enough that the final Domestic Abuse Law must enable men and their families to feel this law is just as much to protect them as any other victims. This is not to suggest in any way that abused men’s needs should take precedence over other victim groups.

Police statistics indicate 20% of recorded victims are male. Scottish Crime and Justice Survey data suggests a higher proportion of male victims and highlights men’s greater reluctance to report. We recognise that such data records incidents rather than on-going contexts of abuse and are limited in that respect. We are aware of the influence brought to the discourse by Michael Johnston (2008)\(^2\) and Evan

\(^1\) Dempsey, B. 2013. Men’s Experience of Domestic Abuse in Scotland: What we know and how we can know more. School of Law, University of Dundee (Abused Men in Scotland) www.amis.org.uk

Stark (2007) who introduced the terms ‘intimate terrorism’ and ‘coercive control’, respectively which better describe the nature of abuse to be covered in this bill. Johnston described intimate terrorism as mostly carried out by men against women, while recognising that some intimate terrorists are women. Stark intended ‘coercive control’ to refer to what men do to women.

Subsequent research (Bates, Graham-Kevan and Archer, 2014) confirm that intimate terrorists include women and Hines (2010) also studied men who had sought help and found them to be suffering similar rates and seriousness of intimate terrorism as help-seeking women.

Numbers of course cannot convey the often shocking reality in situations a victim of coercive control can find themselves in. This is a brief extract from some contextual work done by Allen-Collinson (2009).

“She criticises him for buying a new shirt. He points out that it is a replacement for the one that she ripped to pieces at the weekend. She takes exception to this. First she gags him so he is gasping for air. She then pushes him into a corner. The next action is a new one – she is forcing her fingers into his mouth. It makes him wretch as he tries to pull them out of his mouth. She pushes in the fingers of her other hand. Their son is watching at the bedroom door, silently. Her nail cuts his tongue and he can feel the blood flowing freely. With her fingers still pulling at his mouth... he is choking. He is now spitting blood onto the sheets. She is angry with him for this. He is trying to get his breath back. She bites the knuckle of his index finger with great force. Searing pain.” [Diary, 21.10.03]

‘This instance of female-perpetrated intimate partner violence is taken from the diary of a middle-aged, senior-professional man who, as part of his diary-keeping, systematically charted for a period of just over two years the abuse to which he was frequently subjected by his wife. The physical abuse escalated in both frequency and extent to the point at which the husband was forced to flee his home and children with few clothes and personal possessions, never to return. The diary of abuse, together with transcripts of a series of seven (to-date) in-depth interviews, constitute the topical life-history data upon which this paper is based.’ Jacquelyn Allen-Collinson.

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‘Finally, for those unfamiliar with the research on IPA&V, it might be thought that the case study research portrayed here represents a rare and extreme occurrence in terms of extent and longevity of the abuse, and in relation to the gender of perpetrator and victim. Sadly and depressingly, the research evidence confirms that this is by no means an exceptional case. In “Western” societies... IPA&V are routinely committed by men and women, of all sexualities, across all socioeconomic classes and ethnic groups, and at all stages of the life course.’ Jacquelyn Allen-Collinson.

AMIS encounters men (who often have children) who are quite clearly suffering from the behaviour of an ‘intimate terrorist’ or ‘coercive controller’.

Case Study

Male A - Very quiet, gentle and helpful nature, who would avoid conflict. He met female B as a naïve 19 year old. They lived together for one year before getting married. Prior to marriage B was very attentive, friendly and loving towards A’s family. A close bond was formed with all although there were some questionable aggressive traits/instances which were noticed. A was abused at this time but did not share with anyone.

After four years of marriage their child was born. B did not want a child resulting in A being the primary carer. A very strong bond between father and son was formed. B was quoted as saying, “I never wanted him anyway” and “I hate him and wish I’d never had him.”

A was never allowed contact with family and friends unless B was present, even when a close family member was dying. He was deeply affected by not being able to visit this dying relative.

A was hit on the head with a wooden breadboard; had water poured over him; was punched, had face scratched on several occasions; was severely beaten/kicked while lying on floor watching TV; had a knife at his throat twice.

A was not allowed anything to eat if B was in a bad mood. On many occasions B would cook for herself and child and nothing for him. He was not allowed to get food for himself.

When B was working she would leave a list of tasks in the home to be completed before he went to work. This would include household tasks including ironing her uniforms. This would be checked on her return. There would be unpleasant consequences for A if these tasks were not completed.

A slept on a sheet on the floor for months (not allowed to use the spare bed). He was allowed very little sleep. Even when doing shift work, he had to be available on demand to take her where she wanted to go or to take care of the child while she slept.

B kept spending lots of money and got the family into a lot of debt, which A is still paying for.
A found courage to leave the marital home after forming a supportive relationship with a colleague. He lived with his mother a short distance from his son.

After he left

B stalked A at work; she made phone calls to his work trying to discredit him; she stalked him at his mother’s house at all times of day; she contacted social services on two separate occasions to accuse him of physical abuse towards the child; she phoned A to inform him that she was going to contact social services again and tell them that his mother’s house was dirty. Another effort to halt contact with the child. A bought a phone for his child but B did not allow child to speak to his father on the phone. She took the phone away from the child. Still does not allow contact by phone.

B phoned A’s work again to say he was harassing her with text messages. This prompted an investigation by his senior colleague. He advised him to find a mediator to take his calls but his wife did not allow this to happen. She decides when A sees his son and what time child goes home. She will cancel arrangements at the last minute. She does not inform him of events at school though father now has a separate arrangement with the school.

When this was written B was still very much in control regarding their child. She disregarded advice even from her own lawyer and used the child as a pawn to get what she wanted. She refused to attend mediation sessions. B was still trying to control the situation and often succeeding as A was still suffering from the after effects of the abuse.

Children who experience domestic abuse have an increased chance of being an abuser or suffering abuse as an adult.

Some more examples, from other men AMIS has supported

Insisting on looking at his phone; repeatedly sending texts demanding to know where he is; synching her iPad with his phone so that she could check texts, reply to them to say he didn’t want to meet his friends. Then delete the messages; shared items on Facebook about how useless men are.

She created conflict to isolate him from family; criticised him for not earning enough money; accused him of fancying other women; had a ‘meltdown’ when he suggested ending the relationship; threatened suicide if he left her.

Telling him he was pathetic; saying no one else would put up with him; throwing plates, cups, etc. at him.

He had to sleep in the spare room. She told him to sleep with one eye open; woken with water thrown over him - always on a night before a work day.

His life was consumed with coping with her; episodes could last for hours.
Nipping under the table, a warning of more to come, only done when others around; telling him he’d made a fool of him (same sex couple).

She came at me with a knife. I grabbed her wrist and got it off her. She had a bruise on her wrist. The first thing she told me the next day was she had taken a photo of it and sent it to her friend, saying I’d been abusive. That’s when I knew I was trapped. She knew I’d never leave my children and played up the idea that the mother would always get custody in a divorce.

My salary was paid into a joint account, for which I didn’t have a debit card. She paid it into a basic account for me. She had my online banking details and would track my spending. I found out she had defaulted on a loan she had secured against our house and she had racked up serious debt in both our names. The house was sold and the debt repaid. Neither of us made any money from the sale but money can’t buy the freedom I have now.

One client, still trying to rebuild his and his children’s lives, described the abuse he experienced as ‘when the unacceptable becomes not only accepted but expected’. He had been told by police and social workers that he had behaved as a ‘typical abuse victim’. “They meant that I had continually made excuses for my partner, that I (and the children) had ‘normalised’ what was going on and the belief that the situation would change, that if I proved to be the one consistent, reliable, understanding, forgiving factor in her life, all would in the end be well.”

“Psychological and emotional manipulation (involving punishment and reward) means you end up accepting things like unfaithfulness, drunkenness, drug use, emotional and psychological abuse, neglect (of yourself and children), as well as verbal and physical violence. The manipulation of punishment and reward means that it is possible that the victim ends up facilitating the perpetrator in what is happening, so that the perpetrator can say, “Well, you never objected to ....” It becomes a conspiracy of self-preservation.”

While all the above examples were of abuse enacted on male victims, they have many similarities to abuse that is enacted on women. The impact can be felt years later. One man we are in touch with described how, 29 years after he fled the abuse, he still requires 3 types of medication to deal with the psychological effects and continues to have nightmares about it. Additionally, we have heard from many men about the trauma that is relived when repeatedly hearing in the news, media, evidence sessions, etc. men constantly portrayed as violent and dangerous to women, when these men are trying to recover from years or decades of abuse from women who are or have been in their lives. For such men it can feel that those repeating such thoughtless messages are complicit in the abuse they have suffered.

When asked for his thoughts on the Domestic Abuse Bill, one AMIS client stated: “Any new law should avoid any implicit suggestion that only females are the victims of coercion and perhaps should explicitly acknowledge that this is not an issue of gender.”
The policy objective of the Bill is to improve how the justice system responds to domestic abuse. The Committee welcomes evidence on any aspect of the Bill. This could include views on the following questions:

1. Do you agree with the proposal in the Bill to create a new offence of abusive behaviour towards a person’s partner or ex-partner covering both physical violence and non-physical abuse?

Firstly our statistics would indicate it is appropriate due to the type of abuse experienced by callers to AMIS Helpline:

- Identified controlling behaviour – 87%
- Emotional/psychological abuse – 77%
- Physical – 39%
- Verbal – 73%
- Financial – 22%
- Sexual – 14%

AMIS agrees with the proposal to create a new offence of abusive behaviour provided there are safeguards in place. In common with the Glasgow Bar Association AMIS has concerns about ‘the very real risk of over-criminalisation.’ There does seem to be a risk that what is normal behaviour will be treated as criminal. There is also a risk that it will be easy for perpetrators (of any gender) to abuse the law by making vexatious claims against their partners. We agree with another respondent who feels strongly that the ‘bar should be high’. AMIS would not wish to see large numbers of cases brought under this law. Rather it should be used only for very serious and clear, sensitively investigated cases, while acting as a deterrent or wake-up-call to people whose behaviour has become abusive or those witnessing abusive behaviour.

Service users often tell us that they “can handle the physical attacks more than the emotional and control”. Fathers in particular, but also some mothers, find vexatious denial or disruption of child contact can be by far the most emotionally damaging type of abuse, to the children concerned as well as the excluded parent. Threats of child contact denial seem to be followed by actual denial almost automatically when a father tries to escape an abusive partner. While this is usually seen as a Family Law issue, because of its frequent and devastating use as a form of coercive control, and the risk of child alienation, we firmly believe it should be included as an abusive behaviour recognised in the bill.

AMIS would also like to see more perpetrator programmes for men and women that are voluntary so that it could become easier for people to seek help before their behaviour becomes criminal.

New types of perpetrator programmes need to be developed to deal with the range of risk factors that lead to abusive behaviour in the first place. We can no longer assume domestic abuse is caused by any single factor.

2. Do you consider that the proposed offence is needed to address a gap in the existing law which currently makes it difficult to prosecute some forms of domestic abuse?
Yes, we know of many cases that would have some prospect of successful prosecution that might be difficult to prosecute under existing legislation.

3. *Do you have any views on the definition of the offence, such as the requirement for a course of behaviour, the definition of abusive behaviour, or the defence that the behaviour was reasonable in all the circumstances?*

We believe that a broad definition is useful in that all forms of abuse can be covered, including as already mentioned, denial/disruption of child contact without good reason. We believe that such behaviour is insidious and has a corrosive effect on society generally as so many extended family members are affected. Children not only miss out on the relationship and love of a caring parent but grandparents and often the entire extended family on one side as well. This can have major repercussions later in life when these children grow up and realise what they have missed, often after relatives have passed away.

A defence that the behaviour was reasonable in the circumstances should be available in fairness to any accused person. It should also be necessary that a course of behaviour is evidenced and we would expect this normally to involve many more than two incidents. If individual incidents are serious they can be prosecuted under existing legislation.

We are also concerned that the level of investigation is robust with safeguards against spurious accusations.

4. *The offence is restricted to abuse between partners and ex-partners. Do you agree with this approach? For example, during the Scottish Government’s consultation on a draft offence, concerns were raised that it did not properly reflect the impact of domestic abuse on children. The Scottish Government has sought to address this concern in the Bill, primarily by providing that the offence will be aggravated where it involves a child. Do you have any views on this aspect of the Bill?*

Where abuse is directed against a child or a child is used as a tool or weapon of abuse, an ‘aggravation’ is not sufficient. We would expect a charge of abuse to be raised in respect of the child, especially if abuse is directed at them, as in child alienation. Older people living with the abusers should perhaps also be included.

5. *Do you have any views on factors which might impact on the reporting, investigation and prosecution of the offence?*

We are aware that men are much less likely than women to report domestic abuse to the police or even to tell another person (SCJS\(^7\)). Currently Police Scotland statistics\(^8\) record male victims in around 20% of incidents. SCJS data would suggest significantly more are affected than reported. Men, whether straight or GBTI, are

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\(^8\) http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Crime-Justice/PubDomesticAbuse
affected by the ‘Public story’ (Hester & Donovan\(^9\)* - basically the narrative in the media, from the Scottish Government and some organisations working in the field rarely mentioning anything other than female victims of male abusers. It is therefore difficult for men and LGBTI people who experience abuse to recognise it as such. Men are known to be less likely than women to make use of support services generally\(^10\) and specialist support for them is much harder to find.

Thorough investigation of domestic abuse is crucial as it is not always obvious immediately who is the abuser and who abused. A strong belief in gender stereotypes on the part of investigators and supporters can lead to the unquestioning belief of one partner, even when that partner is the abuser. Example:

‘Mr Justice ……. found that the actions of certain professionals on both sides of the Border actively contributed to the difficulties in assessing the evidence, ‘materiually prejudiced the welfare of both children’ and contributed to the "significant" emotional harm the children had suffered.

These breaches included:

The social worker unquestioningly accepted the mother's account and her failure to make enquiries of the father, the extended families, school, doctors or local authorities "was particularly egregious in circumstances where such enquires would have revealed a fundamentally different picture to that being painted by the mother.'

http://www.fnfscotland.org.uk/news/tag/false-allegations

Practice needs to be gender inclusive, to keep everyone safe.

6. The Bill makes a number of reforms to criminal procedure, evidence and sentencing. For example, it would prohibit the accused in a domestic abuse case from personally conducting the defence. Do you agree with this prohibition?

This is sensible. We wish also to comment on the proposal that removes the requirement for the victim to demonstrate that s/he experienced harm. This could be helpful for some men who can find it difficult to express the impact of the abuse in a way that is interpreted correctly. For example a man who sounds angry about what has happened and who is critical of his abuser may well be seen as 'a typical aggressive man', ‘probably the perpetrator’ or ‘must have done something to deserve it'. Alternatively as the survivor already mentioned points out:

‘The verdict in the case brought against her for assault on one of our children and me was ‘Not Proven’. I have subsequently heard from a lawyer and (indirectly) from a juror that my refusal to use aggressive, vindictive or condemnatory language against my ex-wife counted against me as it appeared to minimise the assault and its consequences. Had I shown more anger and less understanding the outcome might have been different.’


Having had a ‘Reasonable Person’ to evaluate the likely impact of the abuse might have been helpful in this case – unless the RP held stereotypical attitudes on masculinity, in which case men might just be assumed to be unaffected. There seems no easy way for men to express the damage done to them in a way that they will be believed.

7. The Bill would also require the court in a domestic abuse case to consider making a non-harassment order. What are your views on this approach?

We believe this could be useful in many cases where the convicted person does not receive a custodial sentence. However it must not be mandatory as in some instances, it could work against the victim. For example, in the case of a father whose children continue to reside with their mother who is convicted of domestic abuse, a non-harassment order (or interdict?) could mean his losing contact and the ability to sustain a meaningful relationship with his children. It is a concern frequently, and painfully, raised by fathers who are victims of domestic abuse that the children reside with the perpetrator and the father can do absolutely nothing to protect them.

Abused Men in Scotland
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