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Women are more violent, says study

BY SOPHIE GOODCHILD, HOME AFFAIRS CORRESPONDENT | SUNDAY 12 NOVEMBER 2000

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Bruised and battered husbands have been complaining for years and now the biggest research project of its kind has proved them right. When it comes to domestic confrontation, women are more violent than men.

Bruised and battered husbands have been complaining for years and now the biggest research project of its kind has proved them right. When it comes to domestic confrontation, women are more violent than men.

The study, which challenges the long-standing view that women are overwhelmingly the victims of aggression, is based on an analysis of 34,000 men and women by a British academic. Women lash out more frequently than their husbands or boyfriends, concludes John Archer, professor of psychology at the University of Central Lancashire and president of the International Society for Research on Aggression.

Male violence remains a more serious phenomenon: men proved more likely than women to injure their partners. Female aggression tends to involve pushing, slapping and hurling objects. Yet men made up nearly 40 per cent of the victims in the cases that he studied - a figure much higher than previously reported.

Professor Archer analysed data from 82 US and UK studies on relationship violence, dating back to 1972. He also looked at 17 studies based on victim reports from 1,140 men and women. Speaking last night, he said that female aggression was greater in westernised women because they were "economically emancipated" and therefore not afraid of ending a relationship.

"Feminist writers say most of the acts against men are not important but the same people have used the same surveys to inflate the number of women who are attacked," he said. "In the past it would not even have been considered that women are violent. My view is that you must base social policy on the whole evidence."

His views are supported by Dr Malcolm George, a lecturer in neuroscience at London University. In a paper to be published next year in the *Journal of Men's Studies*, Dr George will argue that men have been abused by their wives since Elizabethan times. He uses examples such as the actor John Wayne, beaten by his wife Conchita Martinez, and Humphrey Bogart battered by his wife Mayo Methot, as well as Abraham Lincoln whose wife Mary who broke his nose with a lump of wood.

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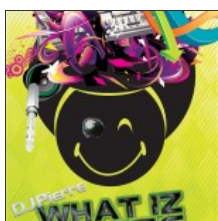
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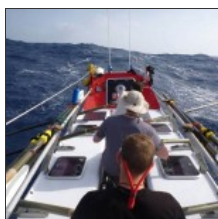
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His research is backed up by historical records which show that men who were beaten by their wives were publicly humiliated in a ceremony called a "skimmington procession". The procession was named after the ladle used to skim milk during cheese making.

Dr George has also unearthed a plaster frieze in Montacute House in Somerset that depicts a wife hitting her husband over the head followed by a "skimmington" ceremony.

"It's a complex argument but we do get more women aggressing against male partners than men against female partners," said Dr George. "The view is that women are acting in self-defence but that is not true - 50 per cent of those who initiate aggression are women. This sends a dangerous message to men because we are saying they are not going to get any legal redress so their option instead is to hit back."

Terrie Moffitt, professor of social behaviour at the Institute of Psychiatry at King's College, London, admitted that women do engage in abusive behaviour and said the Home Office should fund research into the issue in the UK. "If we ask does women's violence have consequences for their kids then the answer is 'yes'," she said. "There is also an elevated risk of children being victims of domestic violence if there is central violence between parents."

However, Dr Anne Campbell, a psychologist at the University of Durham, said that women should still receive the most support because they were the greater victims of domestic violence. "The outcome of violence is that women are more damaged by it and need the bulk of resources," she said. "But women's violence has become increasingly legitimised. There is a sense now that it's OK to 'slap the bastard'."

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