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# Domestic Violence- Women are Half the Problem

April 3, 2010 By [Paul Elam](#) — [Leave a Comment](#)

“ The response to our finding that the rate of female-to-male violence was equal to the rate of male-to-female violence not only produced heated scholarly criticism, but intense and long lasting personal attacks. All three of us received death threats. ~ Richard Gelles

**D**omestic Violence. Even the mention of the words conjures up the larger than life image of some battered, bruised woman on a highway billboard; a day glow orange hot-line number beneath her visage, and some catchy slogan like “love shouldn’t hurt.”

And no, I am not insensitive to battered women. My heart goes out to any real victim. But the day I see the images of bruised men on those billboards, I’ll be less prone to being offended at seeing the images of

beaten women being propped up like the starving children you see on your TV at two in the morning; the ones you can feed, clothe and send to Harvard for 12 dollars a month.

The myth is simple and designed for the simple minded. Domestic violence is almost exclusively perpetrated by men against women. Even better, it means brutish thugs pounding the crap out of Mary Poppins for burning the toast. And here and there, that is true. But if you think it defines the problem, or even comes close, you need to take Dr. Phil off your TIVO to do list and start picking up some real books.

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**But let us scrutinize it now. You deserve a lot more depth than is offered in a sound bite.**

I'll start with some research that most would feel was from a reputable source. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, GA. This is the summary of their findings as published in the American Journal of Public Health, May 2007.

First, almost 24% of all relationships had some level of violence. Half of those relationships involved just one of the partners being violent. The other half were reciprocally violent. Now, in relationships where violence was perpetrated by just one person, over 70% of that was committed by the woman.

Did you get that? In all relationships in that particular study, more than 7 out of 10 batterers were female. Let's look even closer at the data as it relates to relationships where both partners are violent. This half is even more interesting than the first half. The study concluded that reciprocally violent relationships were most likely to result in injuries, particularly to women. They were also a solid predictor of future, repeated violence for women, but not men. In other words, women who engaged in mutual combat with men were much more likely to have a pattern of instigating repeated assaults. Men's violence was much more likely to be isolated, and, contrary to the repeated assertions of feminists, not likely to be repeated.

Now let me sum up those conclusions in a clearer form of English. Relationships where both are violent are more likely to result in the woman getting hurt. Those relationships are also marked by women who are much more likely than men to initiate and maintain that violence in the first place.

We have common expression for much of the men's violence in these situations. It's called hitting back.

“ Women who engaged in mutual combat with men were much more likely to have a pattern of instigating repeated assaults.

I know, there is no excuse for violence. Ever, some would say. But there is legal, and in the belief of many, moral justification for self defense. Either way, it is a judgment call made after, and only after, an attack has been made.

In fairness, it has to be pointed out that this one study, for many reasons, including methodology, can't fairly be generalized to the entire population. And one study alone is easy enough to dispute, even from a sound source. So let's look at a hundred more.

Professor John Archer is a psychologist at The University of Central Lancashire and the esteemed head of the Aggression Research Group at the same university. In his analysis of 100 British and American studies he concludes that women are more likely than men to initiate violence in their relationships and are more likely to be aggressive more frequently. He also addresses the myth that women are only violent as a matter of self defense by reporting that 29% of female college students admitted to physically attacking their boyfriends when no threat was perceived.

I know feminists won't be convinced by this, nor will they by several hundred more studies, but let's look at them anyway. Professor Martin S. Fiebert of the California State University Psychology Department conducted an analysis of 249 scholarly investigations, 194 empirical studies and 55 reviews regarding domestic violence. The aggregate sample size in the reviewed studies numbers over 241,700 people.

Fiebert's conclusion? Women are as physically aggressive or more physically aggressive in relationships than men.

And if you think that the incidence of female on male violence is mitigated by women suffering more injuries at the hands of men, think again.

There are widely conflicting studies on this. Some of them place women at greater risk, but many of them place men. If we examine Fiebert's annotated bibliography which covers an exhaustive amount of studies, there are many times more studies cited that show women more likely to inflict serious harm, including with the use of weapons, than are men.

Are there other studies that contradict this? Absolutely. But there is a significant enough body of evidence to make three things patently clear.

- Domestic violence is not a product of gender. Attributing it to one gender over the other is not only misleading, it actually hinders efforts to address the problem.
- Society is wildly misinformed about the nature, origins and realities of domestic violence.
- Most of our legal and political handling of domestic violence is based on the myths and not the realities, leaving us to put all of our resources into half of the problem.

As in so many other ways, we demonstrate a cultural tendency to remake reality, even embrace lies, when the truth about the fairer sex doesn't make them look all that fair.

Now, many people of sound mind might well say, "Fine, let's just focus our attention on dealing with abusers and the abused, regardless of the sex." But to say things are not that simple is a monumental understatement. Richard Gelles is currently a dean at the University of Pennsylvania and holds The Joanne and Raymond Welsh Chair of Child Welfare and Family Violence in the School of Social Policy & Practice. He is an internationally known expert in domestic violence, and was influential in the passage of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997.

Gelles wrote, regarding his work with Suzanne Steinmetz and Murray Strauss, "The response to our finding that the rate of female-to-male violence was equal to the rate of male-to-female violence not only produced heated scholarly criticism, but intense and long lasting personal attacks. All three of us received death threats. Bomb threats were phoned in to conference centers and buildings where we were scheduled to present."

Now is it me, or is making terroristic threats of bombing and murder a rather ironic way to protest being called violent?

Returning to the evidence, though, it would be easy to make an argument that domestic violence is more a female than a male problem. There are, after all, numerous studies that support that conclusion. But that would be as pointless as the current paradigm, and might result in my car blowing up the next time I start it.

So for those of you screaming for me to quit picking on women and take gender out of the equation, that is precisely what I am doing. And what I am asking you to do, once and for all. If you really believe that all violence is bad and shouldn't be tolerated, then here is what you can do to prove it.

1. Write Vice President Biden and tell him to seek an end to the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), the legislation he authored that allocates billions to women victims but leaves men totally out of the picture. Men are, after all, injured by domestic violence, too. 835,000 per year in America alone.

2. Hold shelters and social services to account when they have no real programs designed for men. Their failure to do this is institutionalized sexism and needs to go.
3. Confront police and prosecutors for their actions. Men who call for police help when attacked by their partners are more likely than not to be the one arrested, regardless of the circumstances. Victims should be helped, not arrested, incarcerated and stigmatized.
4. Be sure to express your objections to and boycott the media outlets and corporations like Pepsi and Fedex that use men getting abused as a sight gag in their advertising.
5. When you see or hear a public service announcement that says something like “A woman is abused in her home every 15 seconds,” realize that is is a actually a public deception, a convoluted half-truth, based in blind bigotry and callous indifference to the victimization of men.

Those are a few good beginnings, but you can best start by simply and publicly acknowledging what so few seem to know. Domestic violence has nothing to do with what sex you are. It never has. Disinformation is a poor way to address social ills. In fact, it just breeds more of them.

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## RESEARCH SOURCES FOR THIS ARTICLE

**CDC Report- American Journal of Public Health**

**Martin Fiebert's Annotated Bibliography**

**John Archer: Sex Differences in Aggression in Real-World Settings: A Meta-Analytic Review**

NOTE: Access to Dr. Archers research is fee based!

Abstracts- If you want the complete studies, you have to pay.

**Prevalence and Correlates of Physical Aggression During Courtship. ILEANA ARIAS, University of Georgia. MARY SAMIOS, State University of New York at Stony Brook. K. DANIEL O'LEARY, State University of New York at Stony Brook.**

**Basile, S. (2004). Comparison of abuse by same and opposite-gender litigants as cited in requests for abuse prevention orders**

**Women who perpetrate intimate partner violence: A review of the literature with recommendations for treatment.**

Michelle Carney, School of Social Work, Tucker Hall, University of Georgia. Fred Buttell, Tulane University. and Don Dutton, University of British Columbia, Canada

Quote from abstract: Particular attention is paid to the cultural influences that shape our conceptualization of "domestic violence" and the fact that empirical research suggests that domestic violence has been falsely framed as exclusively male initiated violence.



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