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Women are 'more controlling and aggressive than men' in relationships

Men are often thought to be the more aggressive partner, but a new study suggests this is not the case



Dr Elizabeth Bates says women are more likely to try to control their partner than men Photo: ALAMY

By Theo Merz

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Women are more likely than men to be aggressive and controlling towards their partner, according to a study.

The research found that women showed controlling behaviour along with serious levels of threats, intimidation and physical violence when in a relationship more often than men.

More than 1,000 young men and women were questioned about any "Intimate Partner Violence" (IPV) they had inflicted on a girlfriend or boyfriend, or been subjected to themselves.

The results are in contrast to earlier studies which suggested women are almost always the victims of such behaviour.

Dr Elizabeth Bates, who led the study at the University of Cumbria, said: "Previous studies have sought to explain male violence towards women as arising from patriarchal values, which motivate men to seek to control women's behaviour, using violence if necessary."

"This study found that women demonstrated a desire to control their partners and were more likely to use physical aggression than men.

"It wasn't just pushing and shoving," said Dr Bates, who presented the results at a meeting of the British Psychological Society in Glasgow. "Some people were circling the boxes for things like beating up, kicking, and threatening to use a weapon.

"In terms of high levels of control and aggression, there was no difference between men and women."

A study in the 1990s led by the US sociologist **Professor Michael P Johnson** coined the term "intimate terrorism" to describe controlling behaviour in a relationship.

He found that such "terrorists" are almost always men, a claim which Dr Bates refutes, pointing to the fact that Professor Johnson's study looked at men in prison and women in refuges, rather than more typical members of the public.

"The stereotypical popular view is still one of dominant control by men," Dr Bates added. "That does occur but research over the last 10 or 15 years has highlighted the fact that women are controlling and aggressive in relationships too.

"A contributing factor could be that in the past women have talked about it more. Now there is more support for men and more of them are feeling comfortable coming forward."

Mark Brooks, chair of the ManKind Initiative, which offers support for male victims of domestic abuse, said the research was "game changing".

"No-one can ever now say that violence against a man from a female partner should be treated less seriously than domestic violence committed against a woman," he said.

"At the charity we're not surprised at the findings, because of the type of calls we get to our helpline every day. What concerns us still is the lack of awareness and services available to support those men

suffering in this way.

"The Government, local authorities and the police must do more to ensure that domestic abuse against men is viewed and treated in exactly the same way as it rightly is for female victims."

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