



Men are Victims of Domestic Violence Too

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Recently I received a letter from a man who wanted me to know that men can be victims of domestic violence too. As pastors and ministry leaders, I thought you, too, would find his experience sobering.

He writes:

Men who are victims of domestic violence have no place to turn. They can be hit, abused, bullied and terrorized by their wives, and the only way they can hope to have contact with their children is if they continue to allow themselves to be victimized.

My experience has been that doors of help close for men. Social services make excuse after excuse for a woman's abusive behavior and scorn the man for taking photos or videos during her perpetration. The man must be ultra perfect, and if he ever does wrong, he goes to jail. If she does wrong, she needs more compassion, more money, more help.

My experience has been that very few church leaders have the courage to look a woman in the eye and confront her about her abusive behavior. Church leaders, therapists, and other professionals often migrate to the "most reasonable" partner, and the partner willing to make changes. So that one is the one who changes and changes and changes only to be hit, raged at, and made out to be a monster, because, well, "all men are monsters."

My wife posted as her Facebook profile photo, a picture my mom took of my wife, our daughter, and me in front of the Christmas tree (2010), in which, under my shirt, I was physically injured by my wife. The picture literally makes me want to vomit and I cannot look at it for more than a few seconds. It is still in my wife's photo album on FB. I avoid looking there.

And as long as therapists, authors, and professionals look at this issue with even a hint of "gender" in view, then, frankly, right now, I feel we've lost. Abuse is to be confronted and our children are to be protected. Families are to be protected. And women's helplines and shelters simply MUST be opened up to men. Either that or parallel organizations can fill the need.

Out of about 20 calls to women's help lines (yes, I've been that desperate), there was ONE time where someone actually fielded my call. Someone actually gave me the counsel, information, and advice that they would have given a woman. That was a VERY helpful and healing call in my life and I am grateful that the woman on the other end of the line neither yelled at me nor hung up on me as others had. .

And as the man, I am urged to "be more understanding." Of what? Of outright abuse? I have never hit my wife. She has hit, bitten, restrained, yelled, raged, etc.

The counselors want to discuss how both of us are perpetrators. Maybe make the discussion "fair" by seeing it as 50/50.

Well some things are not 50/50.

A sniper can kill you from 2 miles away with a single bullet. Was the exchange 50/50? A robber can steal your car. Was that 50/50? Are you just as much to blame as the person who stole your car? Do you need to do "personal work," because someone stole your car?

I have spent about a decade now absorbing abuse, compensating for constant chaos, and I am now repairing my life.

Thank God, now that I have separated from my wife, the kindergarten teachers and administration see more of what is going on. My daughter is well dressed, well taken care of, and OK when she is with me. When she is with my wife, she is either very, very, late, ragged, or distressed. My wife hasn't kept her appointments with the kindergarten staff and oh, now my wife wants to pull her out of her kindergarten, where she is loved, has friends, and plays on a mountainside.

In one sense, I am fortunate, because my wife's neglect of her own child is pretty obvious to those who are in contact with her regularly. I have deep sympathy for men who are abused by women who do a "good job" with their children. That's got to be an even more impossible situation.

And how does it feel as a man to have "escaped" from an abusive relationship with a child? I feel like a complete idiot. Sure, people smile at me and my daughter a lot in public. She sings and is well dressed and both my wife and I are good looking people, so our daughter is simply a beautiful child. But the "background" behind this father with the adorable daughter is simply horrific.

Please don't forget, men are victims of domestic violence too.

The church has often closed her eyes to victims of domestic abuse, but for men there is more sad news:

1. The Family Violence survey as well as numerous other studies have found that men are just as likely to be the victims of domestic violence as women are.
2. Men indeed have fewer resources to help them. The only national toll-free helpline for men is the Domestic Abuse Helpline (888 743 5754). Go to their website to find other helpful websites and resources for men who are abused. www.dahmw.org. There are very few shelters (out of 1,200-1,800 DV shelters) that offer services to men.
3. Men are less likely to be supported or validated. Men who report abuse are often seen as wimpy, frail, passive, or stupid, thus making it much more likely that they won't report. Suzanne Steinmentz, director of the Family Research Institute at Indiana University/Purdue said, "They [men] wouldn't dream of reporting the kind of minor abuse—such as slapping or kicking—that women routinely report." Why not? Because men are supposed to "take it like a man."
4. Society doesn't deem men as "victims", and we tend to perceive women more vulnerable than men. Therefore, abuse by a woman toward a man may seem more justified or excusable than abuse by a man toward a woman. A recent study revealed that more than 51% of men and 52% of women felt that sometimes it was appropriate for a wife to slap her husband. On the other hand, only 26% of men and 21% of women felt it was ever appropriate for a husband to slap his wife.

5. A man calling the police to report domestic abuse is three times more likely to be arrested than the woman who is abusing him. This makes him afraid to report, thus making the statistics for abuse of men higher than we know.
6. When a woman is abusive, she is more likely to be seen as “sick”, and labeled with a mental health diagnosis. People tend to be more compassionate toward someone labeled “sick”. When a man is abusive, he is more likely to be labeled with entitlement issues, power and control problems, character defects, or sin problems. Compassion is directed toward the female victim, not the male offender.

Domestic violence isn't a woman's problem or a man's problem; it is a human problem, it's a sin problem, and it's a tragedy. Why haven't Christian leaders taken a more proactive role in helping both men and women address and heal the violence in their heart and their home?

Please know, God gives wisdom for both the victim and abuser to heal and to change so that generational patterns can be broken. But that will only happen as they find support and encouragement to speak up, and speak out about this so that they can receive the help they and their loved ones desperately need.

Let's make sure that we as their pastors, counselors, and spiritual friends have eyes to see and ears to hear.