

Fact sheet 9: When men are labelled as victims

Extract from Vlais (2018) *Guidelines for identifying and responding to people who cause family violence harm*. North West Metropolitan Region Primary Care Partnerships, p 10–11.

Men of course can genuinely be victim-survivors of domestic and family violence, often from other males' behaviour. Approximately 40–50% of male victims experience violence from a male perpetrator, such as a son, father or brother, or from a male intimate partner.¹⁶⁸

Men can be victims of women's use of violence too. However, studies in several jurisdictions show that approximately 15–50% of men assessed by police to be the victim of a female intimate partner's use of violence, are actually the perpetrator in the relationship.¹⁶⁹ The 'nice guy' effect, combined with the use of force by some women against the perpetrator to defend themselves and their children or to attempt to restore some of the dignity they've lost due to being entrapped by his coercive control, means that men can often be incorrectly labelled (by police and others) as victims.

Perpetrators who are incorrectly identified as victims can use their victim status to further harm and control the true victim in the relationship. He can use that status to hide his behaviour from authorities, gain unsafe levels of access to their children through family law and other means, and isolate her from police and support services.

It is therefore important to be cautious and to keep an open mind when a male client claims to be a victim of a woman's use of family violence, even if police or other services have identified him as such. Obtain a secondary consultation with the Men's Referral Service if you are feeling unsure. Look for the following signs, amongst others, that might indicate he is not the true victim:¹⁷⁰

- any injuries that he sustained are consistent with his partner acting in self-defence
- has a history of one or more intervention orders against him, and/or has any previous arrests or convictions for family violence or other violence-related crimes
- shows signs of using a range of tactics to control his partner's/family member's life
- makes most or all the important decisions in the relationship
- does not appear to be afraid of his partner/family member
- rather than making excuses for his partner/family member's behaviour, as victims often do, is forthright in criticising her and focusing on her faults
- shows little empathy with her needs and emotional responses
- conveys a sense of ownership, entitlement, jealousy or obsession about his partner/family member
- denies any wrong-doing and takes no responsibility for the situation (victims often wrongly take some or most responsibility for the violence they are experiencing).

168 State of Victoria (2016) Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence: Report and recommendations[>]. Vol. 5.

169 Derived through two large-sample studies conducted in the UK, two in NSW and one in Victoria. Page 11 of 33 in Vlais (2018) *Guidelines for identifying and responding to people who cause family violence harm*.[>]

170 Adapted from a more comprehensive list on pages 194–197 of *Towards Safer Families: A Practice Guide for Men's Domestic Violence Behaviour Change Programs*.[>]