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Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence

Although the men in our study have experienced frequent physical and psychological attacks, the physical violence has not necessarily been life threatening. The men have suffered both minor and more serious physical injuries. Blisters, minor cuts, bruised eyes, groin pain, bites, scratched hands and backs are the most common physical injuries reported. One man suffered severe concussion and cuts after his wife attacked him and pushed him over.

Most of the men have suffered a variety of psychological problems both during and after the relationship, such as insomnia, difficulties in concentration, and a deep sense of insecurity and unease. Some struggle with trauma and social anxiety.

The men who experienced a pattern of violence over a longer period of time describe more serious health complaints than those who got out of the relationship relatively early on. Five men said they had gone so low psychologically that they played with the idea of ending their own lives. Three actually attempted suicide.

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Exhaustion, Anxiety and Depression

Fredrik, Harald and Jon all suffered with anxiety for several years after the end of their relationships. Harald has been in psychotherapy for several years after his divorce. He describes periods after the breakup during which he felt anger and despair at having so many years of his life wrecked, because of his wife's violence and anger: he still experiences panic, anxiety and fear in situations that are very ordinary and present no actual danger. For example, he can feel the urge to flee when his present wife tickles him or touches him with long nails. It reminds him of his ex-wife scratching his face, his back and his hands so hard that she drew blood.

Andreas went into depression when his son was 2.5 years old and received psychological help to cope with the contact time with his son. He was completely exhausted after visiting his son and ex-girlfriend, and nearly collapsed because he had used up all his energy on satisfying an unstable ex-cohabitant's controlling and harassing behaviour.

More than half of the men felt lonely because they had isolated themselves and lost contact with their friends and networks. This isolation was a consequence of a sense of being excluded and anxiety about being a bad person.

Fredrik's wife used the abuse he had experienced as a boy against him. Harassing him sexually and humiliating him, she tore down his identity and his feelings of self-worth. She continually pointed out how unattractive he was to anyone but her. When the child custody case between Fredrik and his ex-wife escalated, he slumped into a depression, ending up in hospital. He could not take any more and wanted to end his life.

Several men say they have had to build themselves up again after getting out of their relationships. Filip says that even three years after the breakup he still suffers from anxiety in many situations. He often feels that people with whom he is close might be judging him negatively: "It's like I never know if anyone really likes me." Harald has been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a result of the violence to which he was subjected and he has applied for criminal injuries compensation. He says that without the long-term therapy he has received and his new girlfriend, he would never have managed to get where he is today. New marriages and/or psychological support have also helped Fredrik, Andreas, Tom and Jon to improve their lives after the breakup of their

violent relationships. Filip battled with insomnia and difficulties with concentration, eventually losing his job as a driver after he fell asleep at the wheel. He was on sick leave for one year due to anxiety and depression and had to change his line of work in order to get back into employment. For Albert, the conflict over access had no consequences on his work situation, but it absorbed time and energy and reduced his quality of life for long periods of time. Jonas says "I try not to have personal relationships, I try not to get involved in other people's lives" and he feels that he almost erased himself. Meanwhile, Peter says that he "avoids all confrontation", Deo has felt extremely lonely, and Arild says that he was cowed in the relationship; several men either feared for their lives or wanted to die.

Andreas's financial situation deteriorated badly after he went through the courts about his contact rights. He did not have the resources to hire a lawyer to continue the case further in the judicial system. Tor went to court several times about contact, but lost. He found, as did other men in the sample, that he was not believed or seen as able to care adequately for his child. When he first met his ex-wife he had a good job and a good income and well-ordered finances. After a tumultuous conflict and court case, which resulted in his wife being awarded full parental control, he had a breakdown, lost control at work and went onto disability benefits. He says that his life was destroyed after he lost contact with his daughter.

Increased Use of Alcohol

Half of the men say they have used alcohol to escape their everyday lives and the stresses of the situation. Andreas said that if he had not met his current wife, he might easily have gone into depression and turned to alcohol to stay afloat. Harald first started drinking after his ex-wife died one year after the breakup. He drank to feel better and after three glasses of wine he felt "almost" normal. He would sit and drink after the children had gone to bed.

Jon started drinking a lot after his relationship ended. He sat alone and drank and did not seek any help to deal with his feelings. A friend almost

forced him to seek help at the local psychiatric unit (DPS), where he has had treatment for several years.

Christian does not suffer any long-term effects from his turbulent marriage, but when the conflicts and sense of unrest were at their worst, he dealt with his feelings by drinking more than usual. He drank to escape everyday life and so he could sleep. Christian's drinking habits led to him taking an increased number of days off work with hangovers and anxiety.

Consequences Particular to Immigrant Men

For some of the men, violence has had such a significant effect on their quality of life that much of the interview is taken up with this subject. Since we consciously recruited several men from minority groups, it was interesting to see if they would display any differences to the ethnic Norwegian men. The findings here are quite clear: the consequences of violence in everyday life are more extensive for those foreign men who do not have a permanent right of residence in Norway. The Norwegian men have feared for their lives and suffered a lowering of their living standards, but immigrant men suffer the additional fears of being thrown out of the country and the consequences of that, of being isolated from their own group, and of stigmatisation and loneliness.

From an intersectionality perspective, we see that the combination of several oppression mechanisms gives a more complex picture. Men from minority groups who are exposed to violence in intimate relationships describe a significant reduction in quality of life and enormous loneliness. Two of the men experience the fact that they are gay as an added strain.

Bashir is fighting a battle on several fronts. Almost wherever he goes he is pursued by men from his own region, threatening and bullying him. He sits at home for much of the time, terrified that somebody might come. The only place he feels safe is in the college classroom. Even the college is not completely safe, as in the hallways and at break times he is afraid of other students. Bashir was threatened in his homeland because he was gay and the threats continue in Norway.

I'm sad and afraid, and I'm tired because I've experienced so much in my life. I'm afraid at college and in the corridor. Everyone from my country seems to know me, even though I don't know them, they say "he's gay, he's gay." They say he's a Muslim how can he be gay, I'm going to kill him, they say. They won't do it here [in Norway], I know that, but I'm scared and sad. I don't like being gay, but it is not something I can choose.

Researcher: Are you worried that someone might come and get you?

I feel safe, but my body has had so many problems, so many people have bullied me and said they're going to fuck me and that I'll go to hell. You can't meet God, you'll go to hell. I'm so scared, I was born gay, I'm a failure, I have problems with many things.

Researcher: Do you dream …?

Yes.

Researcher: What do you dream about?

I dream about abuse and that people are bullying me, yelling at me.

Bashir lives with a deep sense of insecurity and even his dreams are nightmares filled with atrocities and abuse. He can never relax completely. An insecure childhood of abuse and violence has left its mark and he shows clear signs of anxiety when we talk to him. The interview with Bashir is also the most difficult we carry out, because at the age of 20 he is marked by such a deep sense of loss and because it is so difficult for him to find any solid foothold in his life.

Researcher: How do you imagine your life in the future?

I hate my life, but I live here and I'm gay. The question is this—I know I live in Norway and I'll have freedom, but because the others bully me I have a broken heart, I have problems here and I can't … some people say I'm going to hell and that's sad, I've thought I'm between life and death. I like my life too. I have problems but I love my life.

What Bashir experienced in childhood was a deep trauma which effected his entire upbringing. Bashar could equally well have been included in the sample of men we will look at in Chap. 6 who are victims of sexual abuse and incest. For this group of men, and for Bashir, we find a different form of traumatisation than among the other men. Problems such as anxiety, guilt, shame, difficulties with social relationships, low self-esteem,

and sometimes obsessive compulsive disorder, are prevalent in these men. We will return to this in Chap. 6.

Zaid, 29, was also attacked because he is gay, as well as being forced to flee unrest in his home country. He was persecuted and subject to violence because of his sexual orientation. In Norway, Zaid had a boyfriend who subjected him to serious physical violence on several occasions. After living at the crisis centre for a while, he has since been transferred to NAV (Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration), who were supposed help him to find a place to live. When we meet Zaid, NAV have still not found him suitable accommodation, and he is forced to move from hotel to hotel. The interview was conducted with an interpreter.

> Researcher: I want to ask you now what you think about your current situation?
>
> *Very bad. He says [Zaid] that even when he lived in his homeland it was a much, much, much better life than he has here in every way. He says he did not come to Norway to eat, drink and stay in a hotel. I wanted to come here and be a part of society, to give something back to society and contribute to the functioning of society, not sit in a hotel and wait, he says.*

Several times in the interview, he says he hates everything. He came to a peaceful country with respect for gays, found an apartment and moved in with his boyfriend. But now, as a result of the violence, he finds that he is left sitting there with nothing.

For immigrants, the experience of isolation and loneliness can be particularly overwhelming, since their networks are, in the main, made up of married couples.

This was the case for Deo. Deo came to Norway to get married. When he first arrived he was virtually alone in a new milieu, where his wife was not only surrounded by her own family but the complete network of contacts. When Deo decided to leave her because of her violence and threats, he also left behind all the contacts whom he had known since arriving in Norway many years before. His wife's family instructed everyone in the community to have nothing more to do with him.

> *I cry because I'm very lonely. I come to Norway and have no friends and only have her and her family. I do not have anything else. I cry and I have no one to talk to. The others do not want to talk to me.*

Deo cries several times during the interview. Even though he has moved out and the violence has ceased, he is still being contacted by an ex-wife who threatens him. What he finds even worse is that his wife's friends and family members have started to threaten his family back in his homeland, telling them that they are going to kill Deo, and also threatening Deo himself with killing his sister.

For Deo, the help and support he has received at the crisis centre have been crucial for both his understanding of the situation and his ability to go on with his life despite what he has suffered.

As previously mentioned, we consciously recruited men of various ethnicities for this study. Men from immigrant backgrounds are also subjected to violence from both male and female partners, but several of the interviews show that there are often additional complexities to their situation that bring a unique set of fears of what might happen to them. Many find that their residence in Norway is threatened, and without a permanent residence permit they are afraid they might be returned to their country of origin if they move out of the family home—that is, if they leave the violent relationship. They also report being excluded and, in part, bullied by people from their region or country of origin. This applies to both heterosexual and gay men. Men from ethnic backgrounds are thus more prone to marginalisation and exclusion, and will therefore require additional attention from support agencies. It is crucial that these organisations be aware of how the transnational nature of these relationships, and the risk of shaming within the wider family in these men's countries of origin, may lead to additional pressures, and may be an important contributing factor in the failure of minority men to seek help or talk about their experiences of violence.

The challenges related to the threat to rights of residence and the potential for exclusion are the same for female users of crisis centres from a minority background in Norway.

The Importance of Therapy in Identifying Violence

We find that violence affects vulnerable men in various ways, and often to a greater degree than they themselves realise while it is happening. As we have seen, there is a tendency for men to under-communicate the violence they have been subject to, in particular physical violence, and to under-communicate their fear of what could happen—both to themselves and to the children. We find that those men who look back on their experiences, where it has been three or more years since they lived with their violent partner, have both a greater insight into the situation and the concepts to talk about what they have been through.

In our opinion, this has to be seen in light of the fact that these men have been in therapy, or have had someone to talk to who has helped them to process and put words to their experience. As Andreas explained: "It's only in recent years that I've understood that I have been subjected to psychological violence." He points to his new wife and his supportive network of friends as having been decisive in his recovery from years of oppression and sabotage of access.

In most cases we see that the experience of violence has had a fundamental effect on these men. They report that they wanted to present an image of being in control of their lives, while in reality they were isolating themselves increasingly from the outside world and felt more lonely than before. For some of them the physical violence eventually became life threatening. Many of those interviewed expressed that it had been good to talk to us about their experiences. For some, it was the first time they had told their stories to anyone.

It is well documented that violence and sexual abuse in childhood and adulthood have a major impact on mental health later in life (Krug 2002; Finkelhor and Delworth 1990; Walker 1984). In general, such conclusions are based on research on women who have been subjected to violence in intimate relationships. Both physical and psychological partner violence are associated with significant physical and mental health consequences for both female and male victims (Coker et al. 2002; Krug 2002). As we have seen, violence affects men's everyday lives and relationships in many

ways. The national surveys *Vold i forhold (Violence in Relationships*; Haaland et al. 2005) and *Vold og voldtekt i Norge (Violence and Rape in Norway*; Thoresen and Hjemdal 2014) also found that violence in intimate relationships has extensive consequences on health. Data from the National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS) also showed that physical partner violence is associated with an increased risk of poor physical health, symptoms of depression and increased drug use in both men and women (Coker et al. 2002).

Previous prevalence studies have shown that men exposed to intimate partner violence with use of controlling behaviours are at an increased risk of developing PTSD (Hines and Douglas 2011). Here we wish to point out that both prevalence studies and clinical trials have shown an increased risk of PTSD in both women and men who experience severe partner violence (defined in this study as intimate terrorism). Hines and Douglas's study (2011) also compared the health of men exposed to intimate terrorism to those who have not been exposed to intimate partner violence, and found that there was a higher incidence of PTSD among men who had experienced intimate terrorism than among other men. Allen-Collinson (2009) and Migliaccio (2002) found that men who were victims of partner violence suffered from suicidal thoughts, disassociation and avoidance.

Violence Affects the Children

It is important to emphasise that partner violence is not only destructive and difficult to cope with for the adults involved, but also for the children. As we have seen, in several of the relationships into which we have gained insight over the longer term, the conflict between partners has ended in a breakup, with serious disagreements over the division of parental care of the children. Threats of sabotage of contact, accusations of being a bad father, humiliation and hitting a partner in front of the children are all forms of psychological and physical violence that also have consequences for any children involved. These children have been witness to conflicts, violence and severe disturbance in the family home. Fear, guilt and a feeling of helplessness are frequent reactions to the wit-

nessing of violence between parents. We know from previous studies that to witness conflicts and violence between parents can be as harmful as being the victim of violence oneself (see Mullender et al. 2002; Holt 2008; Mossinge and Stefansen 2016). Children want to be loyal to both parents and often hide any violence in the family. All the fathers in this sub-study describe situations in which their children have needed intervention from the school health services, BUP (Norway's Children's and Young People's Psychiatric Services) or other health services. There has also been shown to be a strong correlation in Norwegian studies between being a witness to violence and becoming a victim (Mossinge and Stefansen 2016). Again, this knowledge is largely based on families where fathers are the perpetrators. Since there are few studies of male victims' qualitative experiences of violence in intimate relationships, we also lack knowledge of how children are affected by the violence of mothers against fathers. Based on previous research, however, it is reasonable to assume that the consequences on the children are serious—irrespective of which partner is the perpetrator.

Lack of Self-Worth

We have described how men experience problems of diminished self-esteem and social anxiety as a result of living for many years with ridicule, silence, rejection and humiliation. Some felt that their confidence had been so worn down by their partner that they had lost their grip on life entirely. One man described ending up in the accident and emergency department after collapsing in the street with an epileptic fit. When he got back home and told his partner, she acted as though he was not even in the room.

Jon is the only man in this sub-study who was already depressed before he met his partner. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, his early years were marked by insecurity and bullying at school. His reaction to this violence was to take an "underdog position" to avoid further problems. The vulnerability he brought with him into this relationship is probably a key reason for his non-retaliation and for his staying in the relationship so long. In addition, the father of his partner had acted as guarantor for the loan for their apartment, making him financially dependent on her.

As seen previously, men have a tendency not to recognise that they have been subjected to serious violence until after the breakup, and/or they trivialise the violence and believe they ought to be able to deal with it. Those who were, or had been, in their relationships for a long time did not talk to others about the violence while they were still in the relationship. In line with other studies, we found that talking to others about the violence, and in particular seeking assistance from relevant organisations, is central to men's ability to make the decision and carry through the breakup of such relationships (Haaland et al. 2005, p. 151).

Psychological Violence

At the beginning of Chap. 4, we described some of the men's childhood experiences of violence. Some had particularly difficult experiences with peers and/or describe themselves as insecure children. We will now look at how Fredrik and Harald reflect on their vulnerability in relation to the partner violence to which they were later subjected.

Fredrik says that as an adult he has lived with a great deal of uncertainty and fear because of the abuse he experienced as a child. He believes that his fear of being inadequate and the damage he suffered from this earlier abuse contributed to his taking a subordinate role in his marriage. He lived for over ten years with a wife who subjected both himself and their two children to serious physical and psychological violence. According to Fredrik, his past experiences of abuse became an effective tool for his wife to use in controlling and suppressing him. He was afraid to leave his wife, because he had internalised the idea that nobody else would want to be with such a bad person and partner as he was. In addition, he had a stepdaughter and two children whom he did not want to hurt or make problems for.

Harald tried several times during the interview to explain why he had ended up in such a chaotic relationship when he had been so withdrawn and careful as a youngster. He thinks he stayed because he wanted to help his wife and stabilise the everyday lives of the two children. Since their mother was so unstable, he needed to compensate and offer them security.

As we have mentioned, there are several men in our material who have considered or attempted suicide. Some find it difficult to get involved with other people even years after the relationship has ended. We see many similarities between men's experiences and what previous studies show about women's experiences with partner violence. In the Norwegian book about domestic violence against women and children *Bjørnen sover (The Bear Sleeps)*, Alsaker writes about how offensive and insulting behaviour and the abuse of trust destroy women's trust in both themselves and others (Storberget et al. 2007). Insults can, in the contexts of a love or care relationship, be especially difficult to cope with, and the men in our study have gone to great lengths to avoid causing irritation or conflict with their partners by doing what they think is expected of them. Similar avoidance strategies are also found in studies of women living in abusive relationships (Walker 1984; Follingstad et al. 2002; Storberget et al. 2007). In her book *The Battered Woman*, the American psychologist Lenore Walker (1984) describes how psychological degradation, fear and humiliation were the forms of abuse which women found most painful. On the basis of previous studies of women who suffer male partner violence, Walker assumed that women would say that threats of physical violence and destruction of property were the forms of psychological violence which they most feared from their partners. However, the study showed that women's fear of humiliation and ridicule impacted them most (Walker 1984, p. 117). Feelings of guilt, self-reproach and the fear of not being a good enough husband and father are additional important driving factors for men staying in violent relationships. Some have been so isolated that for long periods they have been without any networks or any friends to whom they could talk. The majority of men say that they have, or have had, social anxiety and felt completely worthless while they were living in the relationship. As we have described, several of the men have experienced threats to being deprived of access to the children, and fear of destroying the family has contributed to their failure to report violence.

Why Do Men Stay in Violent Relationships?

We find a varied picture of the reasons why men stay in violent relationships. Those men who have stayed in their relationships for a long time have all taken an actively caring role towards their children and had a desire to help their wives and girlfriends who struggled in the workplace, or had difficulties or psychological problems. A desire to protect the children and the wider family from a family breakup also acts as an important driving force for men to remain, despite any conflict and violence. Several men said they had spent a lot of time trying to find explanations for the violence, why they had been subjected to it and why had they stayed for so long. Phrases like "surreal", "removed from reality", "living in a bubble" and "madness" were used for the relationship they had found themselves in. Several had asked themselves: How in the world did I get into this situation? Why did this happen to *me*? and Why didn't I set boundaries earlier?

Summary of Findings

The majority of the men in our sample have been subjected to various forms of partner violence. Most have been subjected to severe and systematic violence over several years. The stories told by several of those men who did not seek the help of crisis centres indicate that they might well have needed overnight accommodation and the chance to talk for shorter or longer periods. Only 1 per cent of residents in crisis centres in Norway are referred by the family protection service (Bufdir 2016, p. 13). This low referral rate may indicate that the family protection service has little skill in detecting ongoing partner violence between spouses or partners.

We have also found a distinctive form of violence to which men are subjected, namely what we have termed the "switching of the violence relationship". It is a significant problem for men that their violent female partners are in a position to turn reality on its head and tell everyone that *they* are the victims of violence. This is because the accepted social dis-

course makes it easy for women to be believed when it comes to their being the victims of violence in intimate relationships, while men are generally not believed. In such cases this makes the men feel doubly helpless. They themselves internalise this understanding, and feel that nothing can help them, because "no one will believe me anyway".

Another interesting finding is that despite the violence they are subjected to, these men express a great deal of care and love for their wives/girlfriends/boyfriends, and try to understand and protect them. They are reluctant, for example, to report the violence to the police for the sake of their partners. This caring attitude makes it more difficult for men to seek help and look after themselves. They put their own needs aside, and state very clearly when questioned that they thought they could handle the violence to which they were being subjected until it became very serious or dangerous. The men we interviewed also talk about children who have been present during incidents of family violence and conflicts. As discussed previously, children suffer both short-term and long-term damage as a result of witnessing conflicts and violence between their parents. The men who have lived in violent relationships with women for a long time say that their partners have dominated them psychologically through a variety of different types of controlling behaviour. Several of the men have been threatened with being deprived of contact with the children, and say that the fear of destroying their families has contributed to their failure to report the violence.

Our study shows that self-reproach, shame of being a victim of violence and social anxiety seem to be universal, rather than gendered, phenomena among people who experience violence from those who are close to them. Those men who have lived in violent relationships have taken time to recognise and process the violence to which they have been subjected.

The men we interviewed trivialised the violence to themselves and others for a long time. Some of the respondents from the crisis centres, and most of the men from immigrant backgrounds, had difficulty using the term "violence", even where severe physical violence had been used. When they have been in contact with support agencies, these men have often failed to mention the violence. They perceived that they did not fit into the organisation's image of victim and perpetrator, and have been

frightened of not being believed, because the violence to which they have been subjected does not conform to any stereotype. This is important to understand if we are to reach men who struggle with violent experiences and who need help to get out of such relationships and process their feelings.

We have taken our starting point in the experiences of these men of partner violence, and have no insight into the lives of their partners (either female or male) apart from the accounts given by interviewees. As previously mentioned, those men who have experienced systematic and severe violence over time have been involved with women (and men) with psychological problems, who appear to lack adequate coping strategies to deal with conflict.

Based on the men's stories of violence from their partners (both male and female), it is pertinent to ask whether mental illnesses can explain a significant proportion of the causes of the violence to which the men in this study have been subjected. In future research on violence against men, it will be important to investigate the root cause(s) of this violence.

As mentioned earlier, we find an interesting ambivalence in men's attitudes between traditional ideals of masculinity as protectors and providers, and their experiences as victims of violence. How men negotiate the idea of the male provider and their own desire to/expectation that they should protect their wives and children, with their understanding of themselves as the victim of violence, is a topic that has received little attention thus far in violence research. We have merely touched on this subject in this book, and see the need for further studies in this area.

Interviews with those men who have experienced intimate partner violence and then sought help at crisis centres show that men are also subjected to systematic and, in part, serious physical abuse, despite the fact that it seems that psychological violence is the most widespread and profound in these men's stories. They are subjected to violence from both male and female partners, but sexual orientation has little to do with the experience of violence. The traumatising effect that violence has on the individual is very similar, regardless of the kind of relationship the victim is living in.

However, there is one significant difference between the vulnerability of gay men versus heterosexual men in this sample, and that is the experience of sexual violence. Two of the men with gay partners have been subjected to systematic sexual assault and rape, while only one of the heterosexual men describes verbal sexual insults. This is in line with prevalence studies that show that male victims of female perpetrators rarely experience severe sexual violence. Our material is of course extremely limited, but these gay men's experiences of coercion and sexual abuse may help contextualise and illustrate how sexual violence in gay relationships takes place. The violence to which gay men are subjected may therefore have a more complex profile.

Discussion

In the 1970s, there was a sea change in the understanding of domestic violence, from being one where violence in intimate relationships was regarded as a uniquely personal problem for women caused by individual men's psychological problems, to one where the abuse of women or marital violence was regarded as a wider social problem resulting from overarching patriarchal power structures (Lawson 2012, p. 573). Research into women contributed greatly to putting women's experiences of violence and oppression in intimate relationships on the agenda in the fields of research, politics and the general public discourse about family violence. This resulted in the establishment of an ideological debate about masculinity, violence and suppression of women, which further influenced politics and resulted in the establishment of various programmes and support agencies for women and children subjected to violence (see Tjaden and Thoennes 2000).

Violence in intimate relationships was a central theme in the struggle for equality by political agencies. Today, the focus has to some degree changed in Norway, in that gender equality policy now looks at men's experiences and living conditions too. However, the established ideological gender violence discourse can be regarded as a meta-discourse that puts a strong emphasis on our understanding of the victims and perpetra-

tors of violence. Research into men's experiences of partner violence reveals stories that challenge established discourses. Such institutionalised discourses can play an important mediating role in that they become sources and resources that staff in support organisations draw upon, consciously or unconsciously, in their encounters with men and women in relationships characterised by conflict. There is reason to believe that a gender bias exists within the support system as a result of the traditional gender-power perspective still being the dominant one, and that this perspective helps to define what men (and women) can say or do in their encounters with support agencies (Smith 2006, p. 34).

The established gender-power discourse on women's abuse still exists within the support agencies, in the public arena and, as we have seen, the minds of those men who are subjected to physical and psychological abuse by women and other men. In several of the men's stories we find a mindset that says "I am not a real victim" or "I ought to be able to bear this because I am a man".

Despite the many positive experiences with support agencies, it is clear that there are still enormous challenges ahead in reaching out to men with the help they need. In a Norwegian context, we have come a long way as regards gender equality and in highlighting and recognising that men can be victims of intimate partner violence. It is now established in Norwegian law that a proportion of these men need longer-term help from support agencies and, in certain cases, protection (Lov om kommunale krisesentertilbud/Law on the availability of council crisis centres). Norway's Children Youth and Family Directorate stipulates clearly that violence in intimate relationships also affects men and that support agencies must work to improve resources for male victims of violence.

De Welde (2003) claims that "hegemonic discourses of women's powerlessness are not equipped to deal with power from women" (p. 250). Bringing greater nuance to and establishing parallel discourses and theories about the workings of power and partner violence must not be seen as a subordination or rejection of our understanding that violence against women is a major societal problem that requires significant intervention both locally, nationally and globally.

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