

Assessing men who present as victims of family violence but who may actually be the primary aggressor

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Violence-supporting narratives

- Victim stance
- Entitlement
- Righteous anger
- These core beliefs are shaped by social structures, embedded patriarchy in cultural institutions and settings, social norms and peer influences, and men's family-of-origin experiences
- They combine to form the violence-supporting narratives, or stories, that he uses to conceal, minimise responsibility, shift blame and pathologise her
- Result is the attempt, through violence and fear, to maintain power and control over her, and sometimes/often to punish her

Dangers of incorrect identification

- Strengthens his minimisations, excuses and violence-supporting narratives
- Emboldens him further to consider himself as the victim, and to persuade her that she is the one causing harm
- Casts her active resistance and responses to the violence she is suffering as perpetration
- Might make it less likely that she will trust services and seek help
- Can expose her to more risk, with consequences also for her children

Indicators that a man who claims to be the victim of family violence is probably the primary aggressor

- refers to his partner in aggressively critical or demeaning terms, as a character attack and out of righteous anger, rather than fear-based anger or anger about the violence
- seems overly calm and confident, and has no fear or apprehension about the incident or any civil (protection order) or criminal court process that might result
- presents as overly charming or charismatic
- has a history of one or more intervention orders against him for his use of violence or for stalking, has a current order, and/or has any previous arrests or convictions for domestic and family violence or other violence-related crimes (he might be vague about these situations, not supplying many details or using language like 'I think I've been interviewed by the police before')
- discusses the incident in vague and general terms rather than providing specifics
- describes events or circumstances that are inconsistent with the known facts
- reports facts that are inconsistent with his size or that of his partner
- has or had injuries that are more consistent with him being the aggressor (for example, scratches around arms and hands, bruised hands or feet), and which are different to the injuries sustained by his partner
- conveys through his use of language, his account of events and/or description of his relationship(s) a sense of ownership, entitlement, privilege, jealousy or obsession about his partner

‘Red Flag’ Indicators continued

- is forthright, critical and opinionated about ways that ‘the system’ (for example, courts, police) responds to domestic and family violence
- focuses on his rights and how he feels they are being violated – victims will generally not feel sufficiently empowered to talk about their rights or how these rights are being violated
- appears to regard children as his property, believes his children need to show respect and to be ‘taught lessons’, appears unable to focus on children’s needs
- tries to convince the assessor that he is the injured party
- tries to ally with the assessor and subtly or grossly invites the assessor to collude with his story, using minimisation, denial, or other-blaming to confuse what really happened
- evades questions, attempts to control the conversation to discuss what is convenient to him, or diverts the assessor from asking pertinent questions (victims are more likely to be feeling disempowered, unsure of themselves and hesitant,
- leaves the assessor feeling manipulated through verbal tactics of persuasion
- appears to have power and control over his partner
- appears to have a second motive for the allegations, such as a Family Court matter or an affair, and/or appears to be smug about getting his partner into trouble
- 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)
- has trouble empathising with his partner’s emotional experiences
- appears to assert his will over his partner without empathising or considering the consequences to her.

Indicators that a man is more likely to genuinely be the victim if he:

- Reports a series of incidents, not just one.
- Can provide some detailed context around the incidents of violence, such as the situations in which it occurs, the signs that might indicate that violence is impending, how the violence typically starts and ends, etc.
- Is genuinely in fear of violence directed towards himself and/or his children (through expressing this fear, or through describing actions that he takes which indicates that he is afraid).
- Can describe doing things to avoid another incident of violence from the abuser.
- Feels controlled by his partner, that everything or most things he does has to be answered for, that he has little safe space in which to make decisions, and/or feels that his space to make decisions is getting smaller.
- Has been hesitant in the past to seek help for the abuse he's been experiencing, and can articulate the reasons why he's been hesitant to seek help. Victims of domestic and family violence often feel ashamed about what is happening, and might be quite hesitant to seek help for a variety of reasons (e.g. they think they might lose access to their children, have little financial independence, face significant cultural barriers). Men can face the additional barrier of feeling ashamed about being afraid of a woman.

‘Blue Flag’ Indicators continued

- Wrongly assumes some responsibility for the abuser’s use of violence (e.g. “I made her angry”, “I should have known better than to try to discuss that with her”).
- Makes excuses for and empathises with the abuser (e.g. “She was drunk, she didn’t now what she was doing”, “She’s been so stressed at work lately, and the kids have been playing up”).
- Adopts a care-taking role for the abuser out of a sense of guilt or minimisation of his responsibility for his behaviour (e.g. “if I could get her to stop drinking she’d be fine”).
- Expresses that he wants the violence to stop.
- His use of violence appears to have been an act of self-defence or to prevent an impending attack, to defend a child or other, or to resist or retaliate.
- Admits that he used violence out of self-defence or to retaliate (if this indeed occurred), rather than denying it.
- Is worried that if he separates from his partner, his partner’s violence might escalate.
- Describes incidents, injuries, fear, being controlled etc in ways that sound authentic.
- Displays some effects of trauma, and/or signs of anxiety or depression, changes in eating and sleeping, reduced social interactions, missed days from work or study, etc.
- Is concerned that the involvement of police or courts might make things worse. Victims might feel particularly small, overwhelmed or nervous in relation to the system, or fearful of what the consequences might be in terms of retaliation from the abuser.