

# Expert addresses common misconceptions about men who experience intimate partner violence

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With the Johnny Depp-Amber Heard trial underway in Fairfax, VA, an expert on male victims of domestic violence seeks to address

misconceptions about male victims of abuse and the role that false accusations can play in intimate partner violence (IPV). Denise Hines, associate professor of Social Work at George Mason University, located just down the street from the trial, is one of the world's leading experts on intimate partner violence and false allegations of abuse in under-recognized survivor groups.

Though Hines is not directly involved in the case nor does she have direct insight into either party's allegations or their culpability, Hines sees this as an important opportunity to discuss misconceptions about males as victims of abuse and false allegations of IPV.

## **How common are false allegations of domestic violence?**

Our research shows that threats to make false accusations are common in situations where women perpetrate violence against men. 73% of men who experienced female-perpetrated violence reported that their partner threatened to make false accusations versus less than 3% of males in the general population. Among men who experience female-perpetrated violence, 56% said their [female partners](#) actually did make false accusations that he physically or sexually abused her, compared to less than one percent in the general population.

## **Why would people falsely accuse their partner of domestic violence?**

False accusations are a form of domestic violence, another tool in an abuser's "toolbox." They are a way for abusers to further manipulate, control, and maintain power over their partners.

Our studies show that women are significantly more likely to use false

accusations of domestic violence against their male partners than the other way around. It is likely that a female perpetrator is able to engage in these behaviors because of existing widespread misconceptions in both the public and legal sector that domestic violence is exclusively something that men do to women.

## **Why is it important to address stereotypes about female-perpetrated domestic violence and false accusations?**

There are many accounts in the scholarly literature from men who spent much money, time, and other resources to prove their innocence in a court of law because of restraining orders being filed against them under false accusations of abuse; men who said the police assumed the men were at fault; and men whose wives used domestic violence service agencies to further manipulate the men (e.g., by telling the services they were the victims and then using that against him in further legal battles). Employees of relevant non-governmental (e.g., domestic violence agencies) and governmental (e.g., family courts) agencies often hold stereotypes that men are always the perpetrators of domestic violence and that women are always the victims, making it difficult for men to seek services.

## **How do false accusations impact the victim?**

Our studies suggest that false accusations can have severe consequences for the victim's physical and [mental health](#), potentially leading to depression, post-traumatic stress symptoms, and poor physical health.

They can have other severe consequences as well, such as the victim being arrested for domestic violence, losing custody of their children, losing their job and reputation, and losing time and money as they fight

these legal battles for years on end.

(This information is from three separate studies about male victims and criminal justice response, legal and administrative aggression, and the health of male victims.)

## **Is it possible that both people in a relationship are abusing each other?**

Yes, that is certainly possible. One of the strongest predictors of domestic violence by one partner is domestic violence by the other partner, and over half of all violent relationships are characterized by bi-directional violence.

This bi-directional violence can take a few forms. One member of the couple can be the one most responsible for the abuse, but the other partner is also abusive sometimes; both parties can be equally abusive to each other; or one person may just be fighting back or defending themselves. It's difficult to know in any given situation what is going on because each party may feel abused and victimized, and each party may not recognize or may try to justify their own abusive behavior.

## **How common is domestic violence victimization?**

The most recent domestic violence prevalence data from the U.S. comes from the 2015 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), a national study of 5,758 women and 4,323 men that provides information on victimization from sexual violence, partner physical violence, stalking, and psychological aggression. According to the NISVS:

- About 1 in 3 men and women (34% of men, 36% of women)

reported lifetime IPV that encompassed any contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking.

- In addition, 14.9% of men and 21.4% of women reported lifetime severe physical IPV victimization (e.g., hair-pulling, hit with fists, beating, burning, choking).

When considering the percent of IPV victims by sex, NISVS reports that a substantial portion are men:

- For lifetime rates, the NISVS showed that approximately 46% of all IPV victims, which includes any contact [sexual violence](#), [physical violence](#), and/or stalking victimization by an intimate partner, were men, while 54% were women (calculated from Smith et al. 2018).
- Similarly, approximately 47% of all IPV victims in the past year were men, while 53% were women (calculated from Smith et al. 2018).

## **What are the key differences in what female vs male victims of domestic violence experience?**

Men's experiences with domestic violence are not that different from women who experience it in terms of mental health, physical, and even sexual abuse. The key difference is around seeking help. Men are less likely to seek help on a broad range of mental and physical health issues. Coupled with society viewing domestic violence as a women's issue, it is hard for men to identify what's happening to them as [domestic violence](#). They often think "my partner is mentally ill," not "I need help."

**More information:** Alexandra Lysova et al, A Qualitative Study of the Male Victims' Experiences With the Criminal Justice Response to Intimate Partner Abuse in Four English-Speaking Countries, *Criminal*

*Justice and Behavior* (2020). [DOI: 10.1177/0093854820927442](https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854820927442)

Denise A. Hines et al, Relative influence of various forms of partner violence on the health of male victims: Study of a help seeking sample., *Psychology of Men & Masculinity* (2015). [DOI: 10.1037/a0038999](https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038999)

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