

# Men experiencing or perpetrating domestic violence have higher incidence of mental health problems

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Men visiting their GP with symptoms of anxiety or depression are more likely to have experienced or carried out some form of behaviour linked to domestic violence and abuse, according to a new University of Bristol study. Researchers say the findings highlight the need for GPs to ask male patients with mental health problems about domestic abuse.

The study, led by Professor Marianne Hester OBE and published in *BMJ Open*, aimed to find out whether there is an association between men who have experienced or carried out domestic violence and [abuse](#) with men visiting their GP with [mental health](#) problems or who are binge drinking and using cannabis.

Researchers distributed a questionnaire across 16 GP practices in the South West that was completed by 1,368 men aged 18 years and above. The survey asked respondents whether they had experienced or perpetrated any of four

negative behaviours linked to domestic violence and abuse, such as feeling frightened, physically hurt, forced sex, or having to ask permission from a partner.

The survey then asked about experiences of these negative behaviours, followed by questions about their relationship with the perpetrator, frequency and escalation of the experience. Subsequent questions were then asked about the perpetration of any of the four negative behaviours towards a current or former partner in the past 12 months.

The study found 309 men, [22.7 per cent or nearly a quarter] of the 1,368 participants experienced at least one of the four negative behaviours associated with domestic violence and abuse, and 212 [16.9 per cent or one-sixth] of 1,294 respondents reported perpetration of these behaviours at least once.

Researchers also found that men who used some form of negative behaviour towards their partners were three to five times more likely to report symptoms of anxiety than non-perpetrators. However, the study found no strong association between domestic violence and abuse with excessive drinking or cannabis use.

These findings indicate there is a higher likelihood of men who present symptoms of anxiety and depression in [primary care](#) could be the victims or perpetrators of domestic violence and abuse.

Professor Marianne Hester OBE, lead author of the study and Head of the Centre for Gender and Violence Research at Bristol's School for Policy Studies, said: "Research on domestic violence and abuse has largely focused on women and there is a lack of research on men, both as victims and perpetrators. The findings from this study are

important as they suggest that when men present to GPs with anxiety or depression, they should be asked about domestic violence and abuse as there is a higher likelihood that they will be victims or perpetrators. The findings are consistent with previous studies, which found that [mental health problems](#) are more common in men who either perpetrate or experience domestic violence and abuse, and serve as an important indicator to clinicians."

Professor Gene Feder, co-author on the study from the Centre for Academic Primary Care at Bristol's School for Social and Community Medicine said: "The extent and health impact of negative behaviours consistent with domestic violence and abuse among [male patients](#) is largely invisible to GPs. Our study will help focus attention on this hidden problem in general practice and provides a basis for training GPs in how to identify and respond safely to men experiencing or perpetrating [domestic violence](#) and abuse."

**More information:** "Occurrence and impact of negative behaviour, including domestic violence and abuse, in men attending UK primary care health clinics: a cross-sectional survey." *BMJ Open* 2015;5:e007141 [DOI: 10.1136/bmjopen-2014-007141](#)

Provided by University of Bristol

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