

# Project Mirabal – Past, Present, and Future.

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#ProjectMirabal



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## Past: Pre-Mirabal

- Widespread skepticism, from multiple directions, about the ability for men who use violence and abuse to change
- DVPPs subject to more intense scrutiny than other responses
- Internationally, research shows mixed results
- Limited research in the UK was fairly positive
- UK specific model – both inside and outside the CJS



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## Project Mirabal

- Broad and long programme of research.
- Main aim – to understand what DVPPs contribute to coordinated community approaches to domestic violence.
- To break through the ‘do DVPPs work’ impasse



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## What counts as success study

- Began with pilot study in which we asked 'what counts as success?' to extend limited definitions of violence and change
- 73 interviews – women and men linked to DVPPs, staff and commissioners
- Domestic violence as it is lived - a pattern of coercive control - means our concerns should not just be about safety but also freedom (Stark, 2007)
- This was reflected in women's definitions of success



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## What counts as success?

1. An improved relationship between men on programmes and their partners/ex-partners which is underpinned by respect and effective communication.
2. For partners/ex-partners to have an expanded 'space for action' which empowers through restoring their voice and ability to make choices, whilst improving their well being.
3. Safety and freedom from violence and abuse for women and children.
4. Safe, positive and shared parenting.
5. Enhanced awareness of self and others for men on programmes, including an understanding of the impact that domestic violence has had on their partner and children.
6. For children, safer, healthier childhoods in which they feel heard and cared about.



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## Asking a wider question

- Gondolf's work showed that perpetrator programmes do not sit in a vacuum – the wider co-ordinated community response mattered for outcomes
- Also many researchers call for more 'holistic' studies – looking not just at whether, but also how change happens, how knowledge about perpetrators can influence the wider intervention system
- Our research question, therefore, was 'what do DVPPs contribute to Co-ordinated Community Responses to domestic violence'



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## Project team

- Myself and Liz Kelly (both significant background in grassroots women's sector organisations) led the project, but three research teams developed the methodology, collected the data and analysed it:
- Kara Jarrold, Kerry Lee, Ruth Phillips and Nicola Sharp at London Metropolitan University;
- Sue Alderson, Hannah Bows, Julia Downes, Simon Hackett and Richard Wistow at Durham University;
- Tanya Abramsky, Anne Gatugata, Natasha Howard, Charlotte Watts and Cathy Zimmerman from London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.
- Aruna Dhudia (London Metropolitan University) and Pauline Harrison (Durham University) provided invaluable administrative support.



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## Research funding and support

The research was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and Northern Rock Foundation. A research manager, Thangam Debbonaire, at Respect was funded by LankellyChase Foundation to facilitate both the project advisory group and links between the researchers and sites. We thank Thangam, Respect, and the advisory group for their interest, input and feedback over the course of the project.



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## Similarities and differences ...

### Differences

- Funding of programmes – practically all of ours are free for attendees
- Our programmes are on a much smaller scale (low number/coverage)
- Support for women partners/ex-partners core part of the work
- Many all-white groups (all het men in our sample)
- Divide between criminal court mandated/other
- Language

### Similarities

- 'Fake news' about Duluth (conflation of the model and the men's group/curriculum)
- Quest for 'something better' (read cheaper and quicker (less feminist?))



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## Research design 1

- Longitudinal telephone survey (quantitative)
  - 100 women whose partners or ex-partners had attended a programme
  - 62 women whose partners had not attended a programme
  - Before the programme to 12 months after the start date.
  - 5 interviews covering 6 time points.
- Longitudinal in-depth interviews (qualitative)
  - 64 men on programmes
  - 48 partners or ex partners of men on programmes
  - 2 interviews near the start and the end of the programme



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## Research design 2

- 64 interviews with DVPP staff and stakeholders across four locations
- Impact on children – online survey, interviews with 13 DVPP staff, interviews with 13 children aged 7-16
- Programme integrity – 16 interviews with early programme developers and stakeholders, 6 month ethnographic study, 22 interviews with DVPP staff.



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## Research sample

- Twelve Respect accredited DVPPs recruited women and men to participate, completed a detailed pro-forma about their project and four took part in a CCR case study
- The DVPPs were geographically diverse, spanning much of England and with one each in Wales and Scotland. Some were nested within larger organisations, others were free-standing NGOs, with two larger regional providers
- The comparison group was drawn from thirteen Freedom Programmes – a widely available groupwork support for women run by local authorities and third sector domestic violence organisations - all located in areas where there was no community-based DVPP



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For the majority of women whose partners and ex-partners attended a DVPP, the physical and sexual violence stopped completely.

Figure 4. Physical and sexual violence (% yes)




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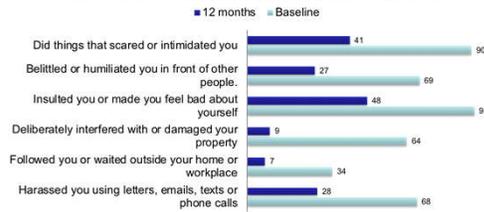
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Whilst the use of harassment and abuse also showed strong and consistent decreases, it remained in the lives of around half the women.

Figure 5. Harassment and other abusive acts (% yes)




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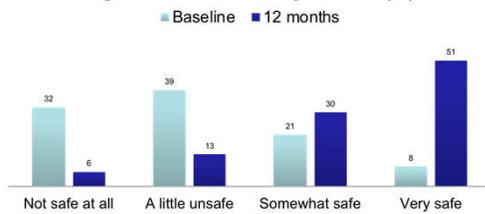
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### Self-perceived safety

Figure 6. How safe do you feel? (%)




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## Expanded understanding of violence

- *When I first spoke to you... I'd say 'It was only a push' but ... I've learnt a push is still violence... like it's not just me a lot of the others who go like 'Oh well I only push, I only pushed her to get out the door'. But I've learnt on the course a push is still like as bad as a punch or a slap or whatever. (Felix, Time 2)*
- *How I am around her, what words I use, how I treat her, how my tone of voice is, how controlling I am. These little things that I thought were only little, they are huge but I never thought of that. I thought I was just doing what every other bloke did, ya know and it's just not. (Matthew, Time 2)*



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## Reduced violence and abuse

- *Three times over six months where it has been majorly aggressive or abusive, whereas before the course it was probably once a week... It's gone down and it was continuing to go down because instead of having an argument... even if she was angry or mad or something I would always try and use my techniques on myself, which was keep myself calm, try and talk and find out how she was feeling and approach it in a different way. (Simon, Time 2)*
- *I think there's been both – still quite a lot of verbal abuse, and at times, but much more seldom physical aggression. But I would say both of them have reduced, physical aggression especially (Alice, Time 2).*



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## Understanding and appropriate use of tools

- *The breathing and the counting down from ten, definitely... I shut my eyes and count down from ten and then I just seem to calm down... Something so simple, I wish I could have done it years ago (Ken, Time 2).*
- *There's only been two incidents that I can recall that he's been physically violent, where he's pushed me and not letting me get out the kitchen door. And when it is like that I'll back down and... and then I think he realises once he's done it, once he's pushed me... So he sort of stands back and he knows he's overstepped a mark, whereas before he started the course he wouldn't know that he'd overstepped that mark, it's a massive difference. And then he will take himself out. On those two occasions I didn't even say timeout he said 'I need a timeout, I'm going' and gone. (Hazel, Time 2)*



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## Respectful communication

Figure 2. Respectful communication (%)



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## Engages with disagreements

- I think she feels perhaps more comfortable being able to respond back to me [...] at the programme we talk about the pyramid of power, whereas I was probably sitting at the top, and now things are a bit more equal [...] [Partner] hopefully feels that push back now, without me going off on the handle and getting abusive. (Bart, Time 2)*
- Just constantly on edge because he was like a ticking time-bomb, he could just... the slightest little thing he would fly off the handle so... I never felt totally relaxed and comfortable. A lot of the time I was frightened to even open my mouth to say 'It's sunny outside' or just something normal... frightened to say it because he could have kicked a table or put a hole in the wall or something. (Hilary, Time 2)*



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## De-escalation

- It's like recognising the volcano and the feelings and emotions that build up to like an explosion so you're not getting up to a certain level, you're keeping yourself down low, you're not allowing yourself to get up to the higher points where you would explode... When the argument is starting to get a little bit heated, she can get a bit scared because she knows what could happen, but that's when we sort of bring in the other issue - safety factors I suppose where, you know, we're stopping it before it gets to that (Sebastian, Time 2).*



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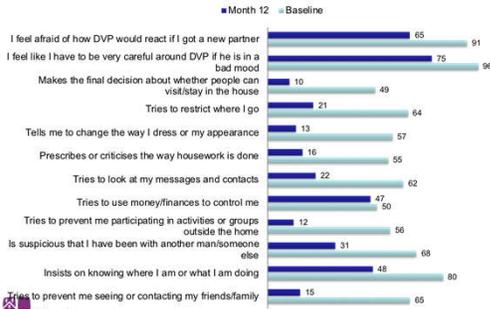
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## Expanded space for action

Figure 3. Space for action (%)




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## Relations with others

*I think to a point he gets frustrated with me because where I've sort of got so used to a degree of just being in and not doing anything and not mixing with people because I just thought I can't be doing with the arguments, now he's actually saying 'Well you need to meet up with your friends, you need to do this, you need to get out more'. And I'm sort of making the excuses now like 'Oh I can't be bothered' or 'I'll do it tomorrow' or something. But I think it's just because I've got so used to being in, it's almost like you become a hermit and you get anxieties and that and you don't even realise they are there. (Jill, Time 2)*

*I had to go shopping with him because otherwise it would be timed - 'how long you've been', 'Where've you been, been up to [nearby town]?' ... I mean once we were decorating the bedroom and we ran out of paint. I went to [town] for some paint and I just called into Asda, it was his birthday the week after, it was the only opportunity that I had to get him something without him being there, 'cause even calling home from work he knew what time I was due in from work and if I was five minutes late 'Late aren't you?' So I called in, I pulled up the car on the front and he was sat on the wall with a cup of tea and he just looked like my Dad, you know, like I was twelve years of age and I'd come in late. (Sophie, Time 1)*




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## Healthy emotional life

- I think I've still got that issue with pulling back all the time. But I think that's more that's probably more me - too scared to make that first step to see if you know that kind of dip your toe in the water to see how hot it is type thing from last time because there hasn't been an occasion where I've been on a night out or I've been alone with me friends for a long amount of time ... So I think that's something that I am going to have to take a step forward and see if our relationship can move on to that... and if I do go out, is he going to react in a normal way that every normal partner should react? (Jessica, Time 2).*




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## Awareness of impact on self and others

Figure 8. awareness of self and others (% - decrease represents improvement)




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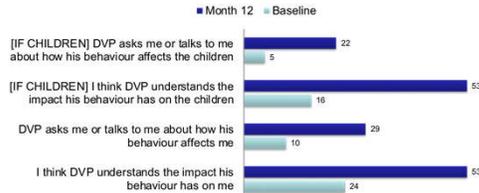
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## Awareness of impact on self and others

Figure 9. awareness of self and others (% - increase represents improvement)




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## Less 'all about him'

- *I thought I was infallible, till then (Justin, Time 2).*
- *The thing is I didn't care. I had no empathy with her, I couldn't give a shit how she felt, it wasn't my problem as far as I was concerned (Todd, Time 2).*
- *Never even crossed my mind that (sighs) – the impact of my behaviour and the effect it has on other people, because again I always had this thought that king of the castle type person. And it never really crossed my mind until now... I was probably aware of it in the back of my head somewhere, but chose to ignore it (Sebastian, Time 2).*




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### Less 'all about him'

- *I don't think he was aware at all... it was all about him, him, him (Adele, Time 1)*
- *He's **incredibly** self-centred, it's all about him (Elaine Time 1)*
- *I don't even think he did. The taking over with the cooking and stuff, he thought he was being helpful. Not controlling. I don't think he acknowledged the fact of making me feel about this big. I think he thought that he was just having his opinion, and that I wouldn't be affected by his opinion, that I wouldn't feel bad and I wouldn't feel affected. (Grace, Time 1)*
- *I say that completely genuinely and I wholeheartedly believe that he never thought that he was doing anything wrong (Holly, Time 1)*



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### Awareness of how it changed how others saw and responded to him

- *Right at the beginning I knew it had affected others - and when I couldn't see the children I knew it affected others, and when I spent a day in a police station I knew it had affected others, and when I saw my name on the front page of the local papers I knew it had affected others - when I've seen good friends of mine turn their back on me I know it had affected others... I think it makes people feel uncomfortable and makes them not like me to the same degree, and it blocks off a load of communication, a load of relaxed feelings, it makes my life more difficult and less fulfilling, and their lives - they just think less of me. Don't necessarily wanna be around me (Barry, Time 2).*



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### How change happens 1

- Not a process that involves a 'lightbulb' moment - but rather a series of sparks - different for each man - some of which do or do not light up. Hence our 'steps towards' change.
- *I don't think there was a moment... during the programme they all say like the penny drops, as it were, all of a sudden this light-bulb moment and there never is... it's like a little fairground machine where you put a coin in and it bounces off various little pegs and it's only working its way to the bottom. The programme is like that... I know that I will be remembering it when I'm in my 70s and my 80s ... But it's never like this light-bulb moment. I always say it's like this little coin that you drop in and it bounces around for ages and it sort of argues with yourself and all of a sudden dink it's in the bottom before you know it (Kieran Time 2).*



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## How change happens 2

- Techniques were important
  - Time out
  - Positive self talk
- Length was important
  - Men talked of needing time to absorb the content
  - Time to decide they wanted to change
- The groupwork was important
  - Seeing oneself in others and being challenged by peers



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## How change happens 3

- Men had very stereotypical notions of being a man – protector, provider, head of the household which fed into the sense that 'he knew best' – the micromanagement of everyday life (following Stark)
- Re-making gender was fundamental – understanding and unraveling male privilege and entitlement
- Learning how to be men differently in a heterosexual relationship and as a parent



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## Mirabal future ... holding tightly onto gendered understanding and interventions

Most research on DVPPs has focused on *whether* men change rather than the questions of *how* and *why*.



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Downes, J., Kelly, L. and Westmarland, N. (2019) 'It's a work in progress' : men's accounts of gender and change in their use of coercive control, *Journal of gender-based violence.*, 3 (3). pp. 267-282.

**Key messages**

- Investments in gender norms underpin men's use of coercive control.
- Reductions in men's coercive control is connected to men's ability to unpick gender norms.
- This paper provides empirical evidence for keeping gender norms and expectations central in work with violent men.
- We argue that coercive control is more dynamic, contestable and open to change than previously thought.



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### Understanding men's coercive control: normative gendered expectations

- At Time 1 qualitative interviews men were able to offer a multitude of examples which they understood as attempts to control their partners, most of which could be legitimated through gendered norms about heterosexual and familial relationships.
- Most participants talked about living in a liberal era of gender equality in which the life choices and opportunities of women were considered equal to those of men.
- 'If you want to go and do something do it...There [are] no gender guidelines I don't think' (Aaron)



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- 'I believe what's expected of a man is that he's supposed to be masculine, take care of his family, *protect* his family.' (Roger)
- '[what is] expected of men in a family sense I suppose would be to look after your family, *provide* for your family...From a society point of view...probably about being *strong, not showing weakness*'. (Todd)
- 'I just wanted her to be basically – a mother to my son and then like stay at home, do the house tidying, do the shopping, and then basically – basically look after me'. (Fred)
- I was a bit 'come here let's *protect* this little family'. At the time, it was really...I genuinely wanted to do that because I craved a family. I never really had that proper family. My dad left when I was very young and I didn't want that to happen so I kind of smothered everybody and wanted to *protect* them. (Brendan)



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## Regulation as protection: enforcing standards, routines and being right

- The way she washed up...the order that she washed the pots and pans and glass and things like that...she doesn't have an order...she'll literally wash things as and when she grabs them basically. With myself personally I'll have an order. I wash up the glasses first or the bread board first and the glasses. Everything that's non-greasy first and then work my way to the plates and the knives and forks and then the pots that we've actually used to cook in. That's the way I would do that and basically try ask her to do it that way and explain why...that it's a better way of doing it and yeah she wouldn't have it and we would have an argument because I wouldn't see her way and she wouldn't see my way.



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Well if I came in and there was a pile of dishes and loads of washing all over the floor, I would say 'you've got a big 8 kg drum washer there, well why don't you put something in it?'

I: And what would she say?

You're always having a go at me!' I said 'well look, you can stand there and smoke 50 tabs [cigarettes] a day but you can't do the washing?' I said 'the washer does the washing, all you do is put the powder in and switch it on'. Criticism...I was always classed as critical. If I went in and there was no food in her cupboards '[Partner] you need to go shopping' it was 'don't you tell me!' and all that. You couldn't even in the end suggest anything because it was just classed as criticism and 'what do you know?'...Well you'd look and she'd never been anywhere, she'd never done anything. And I thought well if you're doing nothing and you're going nowhere, why don't you do your housework? Tidy up this and tidy up that because with children in the house it does get messy, you know what I mean? And anything I said would just be same again 'shut up this is my house!' (Grant)



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## Deficiencies inflate responsibility: reforming women

- Some men infantilised women by assuming that she had no mind of her own and was therefore highly likely to be corrupted by dangerous external influences.
- *'I'll put a judgement I don't like this person, I don't want them to ever come to our house...so therefore she knows...that I know they are a bad influence...other times she corrects herself and sees it for what, it takes some time but she says it afterwards 'You know what, you were right, because that person is...this way and they are trying to use me.'* (Henry)
- This tactic becomes effective as she 'corrects herself', meaning that she now conforms to his judgements on whom she should and should not spend time with.



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## Pulling towards as pushing away: managing jealousy and insecurity

*'I wouldn't say to her like, 'You're not wearing that, 'I - I'd never - I'd never say that, but I would give that disapproving look, but basically coz I - I didn't like - I'm a man and I know what men like, and I - I don't want other men looking, so I - I think to a certain extent it's understandable, but I never said to her, you know, not - not to wear anything.'* (Fred)

Other men used more direct ways to prevent their partners from going out including refusing to do childcare, threatening to leave with the children, causing an argument or commandeering car keys. Falsely claiming to have no money or withholding money was particularly effective.



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*'If I knew she was going out drinking that week then I would say 'Do you not want to make plans instead of going out drinking with ya mates and spending money, we'll... us will do something like me and you and the bairn or me and you.'* (Casper)

Here men intentionally used gender norms related to heterosexual relationships and the family to obscure the power inherent in restricting the freedom of their partners.



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## Challenging coercive tactics: letting go of gender expectations

- A DVPP can provide men with opportunities to reassess their everyday lives.
- The group work men participated in involved a critical and collaborative approach that encouraged them to unpick gendered power relations.
- Change for this sample of men was an uneven and incremental process, in some ways particular to each person and their relationship context
- *'it [was] always that, "Right, OK, I'm head of the household, I - you know, I'm going to do what I want to do, whether you like it or not"...you just stopped doing it'.* (Sebastian)
- *'it's a work in progress, it's not like a light switch that you can turn on and off...it's a thought pattern or a thought process which you need changing completely and it takes time to change it'* (Damian)



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## ‘You don’t always have to be right’: finding collaborative ways of being

*‘it does annoy me, coz that’s my family’s gone, just for male pride or stubbornness – I just thought I was doing the right thing, you know, at the time. And I wasn’t.’ (Jasper)*

*‘You don’t always have to be right. What I’ve learnt on the programme and other people have picked up on it as well is turning round and saying ‘I’m wrong’. Sometimes in the past you’ve argued about something so insignificant ...’ (Brendan)*

*‘I always felt responsible for everyone where like now it’s...I’d point out stuff calmly but it’s down to them what they do at the end of the day’ (Brendan).*



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## ‘None of us are perfect’: questioning the ideal

- This process of questioning and dismantling gender norms also allowed men to uncover newfound respect for imperfections and flaws.
- This challenged perfectionistic ideals that ex/partners were previously required to live up to.
- *‘I’ve justified that to myself, because this woman is behaving like a child, and so I’m – can slap her round the face, I can slap her round the legs, because she needs to be shocked and she needs to be frogmarched, she needs – for her own safety because she’s lost her mind. D’you know what I mean? And of course that is awful.’ (Justin)*



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## ‘My heart is more open’: men’s emotional work

*If I look back on my previous relationships, if I didn’t hear from my partner or something, then I’d start – I’ll start panicking and then I’ll start accusing them of stuff, but now I step aside and just let them have their own space, and, then I just wait till they contact me when they’ve got the time to do it. (Fred)*

*As a man now, I’m proud that if my son sees me cry it shows that he knows ‘My daddy is not a robot, my daddy is actually human and he does have feelings and he is sad and he is happy and my dad has different emotions, just like me’...I used to lock my sadness away. I was only happy when I wanted to be happy, whereas now my emotions come out more and he gets to see properly what a man is meant to be.*



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## Mirabal future ... the importance of language

Kelly, L. and Westmarland, N. (2016) 'Naming and defining 'domestic violence': lessons from research with violent men.', *Feminist review.*, 112 (1), pp. 113-127.

In this paper we argue that framing domestic violence in terms of incidents – whether in research, policy definitions or practice responses – reflects how violent men describe their behaviour rather than what we know from survivors.



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- The question 'what is domestic violence' is one that is strikingly simple to answer on the one hand, yet complicated and contested on the other.
- Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. (HM Government, 2013)
- Many problems, including with prevalence data, which leads to arguments around whether domestic violence is gendered, and thus whether responses to it should be.
- Stanley et al. (2012) - men in general population critical of definition



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## Listening to men's talk about violence – 'incidentalism'

- Hearn (1998) notes that men seek to represent themselves as 'not violent men', their actions as being 'out of character': the violence is presented as 'incidental' to their lives.
- The word 'incident' is itself a convenient reduction, fitting neatly into, and perhaps between, several discourses, including those of medicine, law and social work' (Hearn, 1998, p85).
- This allows men to disconnect the 'incident' from the context in took place in; it becomes the exception to the non-violent 'rule'.



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## 'The incident' talk

- I think it was more verbal. There was an incident once with a knife (Aidan, Time 1).
- Before the incident in the summer there'd never really been... there'd been like name- calling to each other but there'd never been actual like kicking shit out of each other, that never took place (Giles, Time 1).



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## The work of 'just'

- It's more name calling... like calling her a 'stupid bitch' or 'psycho' just things like that, just... anything I know would get to .... It was just frustration... I was just letting out for some frustration - punching the wall (Desmond, Time 1).
- To be fair I don't think I have ever been violent towards L. In arguments and that I've maybe walked ... tried to get out of a room and she's standing in my way and I've literally ... just walked almost through her basically and not let her get in my way, just pushed past basically. Not pushing her physically with my hands or anything... just squeezing past if you know what I mean? (Emil, Time 1).



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- Well, heated arguments, I'd call her names, I'd basically just be horrible to her. So I mean be – well, like I say, aggressive, I'd swear at her, I'd take the piss out of her to make her feel small, make her feel bad, and that's basically about it (Emil, Time 1).



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## Refusing to remember

She said, 'This is over - the relationship is over'. I can't remember what I said afterwards, she probably could. I said something, erm - 'I'm gonna kill you'. I said that to her, and she thought I was joking or being flippant. And I don't remember myself saying that. I vaguely remember pulling the curtains, and, she was on the bed. I knelt on top of her and she's just looking at me angrily, thinking what am I gonna do now? And she didn't know, it came out of the blue, I put my hands around her throat and she still thought I was playing a game. I don't remember doing that, I just leant over like that. And I started like doing that, and then squeezing, and then after so many seconds, we can't - she can't remember, I can't remember - I pulled away. And I looked at her, I think it's - she mentioned she was like (makes choking sounds), that's when I stopped (Owen, Time 1).



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## Getting in his way

There's two incidents, one with the mobile phone and me slamming her in the door. I mean she was following me, I slammed the door behind me. She was in it and she still tried coming, so I tried to just shut the door with her in it (Barry, Time 1).



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## 'I have never hit her'

... when I'm like that, she is scared... she's quite often said to some people the way I've been might not be so bad, but because of the violence that she's experienced with her ex husband, her first husband, to her it's like a hundred times worse ... And, I dunno, I suppose sometimes she'd play on that (Sebastian, Time 1).



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## The invocation of ‘we’

The glass was the biggest thing... that was like the biggest thing I'd ever done... we'd had... pushing and shoving, I'd never struck her, ever... a lot of it was restraining for my safety as well a couple of times as well I'd been attacked, one of them I got pierced by a screw driver and cut... and grabbing hold of her and restraining her... most of it was... it was in fact the restraining of it. The glass incident was the, certainly the most violent and the angriest that I'd ever been. Inside I just felt... I'd never felt like that before... but as in terms of... of actual violence it was restraints, it was always restraining (Brendan, Time 1).



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## But then again ...

- Dexter: No the only abuse I have used is verbal.
- Interviewer: We've talked quite a bit about some of the verbal abuse. Would you say you were aggressive as well?
- Dexter: Oh yeah, my face is all screwed up and threatening. She's most probably shitting herself (Dexter, Time 1).



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... as I said, I've never, apart from that one time, I've never been violent to her. I may have snarled at her or intimidated her, with my face and my body language and looks and stuff, but specific instances, no I couldn't give you them. But I know that I have done that quite a lot of times, where there's the threat of violence, or the sinister threat of something bad might happen has been more effective than – than violence itself (Bart, Time 1).

Yes... and she would say things like that she was scared of us when I was like angry and things like that and I'd say to her 'Well that's not the same as us hitting you' and she would say 'Yes but I'm worried if you do'. 'Yes, but I'm not going to' [Laugh] (Desmond, Time 1).



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## Beyond incidentalism

We argue that framing domestic violence in terms of incidents – whether in research, policy definitions or practice responses – is to adopt the talk of abusive men which serves not only to minimise domestic violence, but also explain it in ways that disconnect it from gender, power and control.



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