

Sometimes there is a warning that violence is imminent, and this may be triggered by alcohol or drug abuse. Other times an attack can come out of the blue.

Violence against women is only part of the problem. It is sometimes the woman who is violent towards her man. This is known as the hidden side of domestic violence. For a man to be on the receiving end of abuse is often seen as a comic situation, and sadly this adds to the reluctance men have to come forward and speak about it. But it happens all the same. The humiliation which accompanies this abuse makes it just as hard for men to break free and seek help. Erin Pizzey who founded the first refuge for battered women and children in London, England, now speaks of her concerns for men as well.

On the Internet there are several different support groups for women on the receiving end of violence. And in the US, Australia and New Zealand I could find help for men, but it was virtually impossible to find help for men in the UK. I wonder why this should be so?

One survey in the US discovered that where women have been accused of violence towards men it was not as one might suppose from self-defence, but as a reaction to men not paying attention or listening to them. I am not the judge, but these must have been very desperate women.

The Department of Justice reports that every 37.8 seconds somewhere a man is battered in the US. Every 20.9 seconds a woman is battered. Frightening figures. The Home Office in the UK reported in their survey into domestic violence that women are more likely to be badly injured and to suffer repeated attacks than men. But domestic violence is a two-way street not to be tolerated whichever way it goes. No one should live their day-to-day life in fear of another.

The question often asked is why do people stay in an abusive relationship? The most common reason is because of financial restraints or fear of losing the children. It is easy from the outside to say 'get out' but often there is hope that 'things will get better' or shame at saying to an outsider 'I am being beaten'. There is sometimes a mistaken belief that love will conquer all. This usually covers up a reluctance to bring things to a head and face all the changes that a challenge might bring about.

If there are children in a relationship this brings with it added worries. All research shows that if children witness their parents' marital discord and fighting, this will affect them deeply and their emotional well-being will be harmed. They will be scared by what they see and hear. Don't trick yourself into believing that they do not notice, or will not be affected by it.

The sites I found most helpful on the Internet were where addresses or telephone numbers of refuges were listed and where it was indicated that although in the main these were for women and children, they were also sympathetic towards men who needed help. There is help 'out there' so don't be afraid of looking for it. There are people who will listen, and help you to decide upon the best course. They will also provide some guidelines to assist you with your own safety, and that of your children. Be on guard, too, even if you have left your abusive partner, since you need to keep alert.

If any or all of this rings a bell with you, or you know of someone who is being abused, don't hesitate, get help and protection now. Some men and women have delayed, and tragically they are no longer alive. For further information, visit www.familyonwards.com

A Male Victim

The writer would like to remain anonymous.

I have always been a shy man, especially with women and when I got my first serious girlfriend at 25. I fell totally for her. She was quite physical and would occasionally punch me, not really hard, well not to me, on the shoulder or back, on the shoulder. I don't know when it started going wrong but gradually the punches got harder and aimed more for the softer parts.

There was verbal abuse as well, I was not good in bed, not earning enough, I couldn't cook, or tidy properly... Then one day I came in to the kitchen, I said 'Hello', she mumbled something and I went to put my arms around her. She spun round and smashed the edge of a cast iron skillet into my ribs, breaking three of them.

She was terribly apologetic and I forgave her, but after a pause the insults and blows came back. I called The Samaritans and they gave me the number for an organisation, I called them and one of their staff asked me what I had done to provoke her. I don't really know what I thought or felt, I only know I woke up the next morning eight miles away from the phone box.

I went back to our shared flat and found her sitting in the kitchen. She turned and smiled, I thought it was OK then she went berserk, she started to slash at me with a kitchen knife. If I had not been a martial artist I have little doubt I would be dead now. I stopped or blocked all of her blows but four, I still have the scars on hand, wrist and chest where she scored on me. I turned and fled.

After a trip to hospital where I said I was a victim of a gang attack (I still did not dare say that a woman half my size was beating me up). I returned to the flat when she was out and packed my bags.

I called for a taxi and found there was no refuge for me - no demand for one - women don't attack men, what had I done? In desperation I went to my old landlady - she had a room to spare - and I was an old friend. Three days later she tracked me down and created a scene outside - eventually the police came and after an interview I was advised that it was not worth my while to bring charges - nothing would be done and she was bringing counter-charges and would use that as a defence.

It was made clear to me that if I dropped my charges she would drop hers and even my own lawyer made it plain that this was my best option. I left town and came down to London, that was twenty years ago, I am still single, I do not dare get close to another woman. I wish I had pressed charges maybe it would bring closure or maybe I would be branded as a dangerous thug, I wish I had never met her, I wish I could have my life back.

Courtesy of www.bbc.co.uk