

The Problem of Men's Violence Towards Women & Some Ways Of Addressing It.



“Men, who forgetting they were born of women, do like vipers deface the wombs wherein they were bred.”

(Emilia Bassano – First woman poet to be published in England - 1611 AD).

“Every man and woman will sit under their own vine and under their own fig-tree, and no-one will make them afraid, for the Lord Almighty has spoken.”

(Micah – Prophet to the kingdom of Judah - 735 BC).

Sometimes a single violent event in the life of a nation seems to grab the attention of the entire nation in a particularly powerful way. This may be due not only to the brutality of the attack itself, but also because it highlights and draws attention to a much deeper and wider malaise in society generally.

Such an event was surely the recent kidnap and murder of Sarah Everard whilst walking home in London. Her death has sparked a national conversation about women's safety.

Women everywhere are fed up and angry at the intimidation, oppression and abuse many of them suffer at the hands of men. Indeed, some believe that a 'rape culture' has now developed where thoughts, behaviours and attitudes which normalise, trivialise, encourage and even celebrate sexual violence, are regarded as acceptable.

A report by End Violence Against Women from 2016 found “endemic levels of sexual violence and harassment in schools with 5,500 sexual offences reported to the police as having taken place over the three years from July 2012-July 2015, including 600 rapes.

As a man, some would argue that this biological fact in itself debars me from commenting and writing on the subject. I don't agree; this issue will not be solved by women alone ~ it is a human problem.

In England & Wales in the year ending March 2018-19, 670 people were murdered. 429 (64%) were male and 241 (36%) were female. The numbers of females murdered was up 10% on the previous year and the highest since 2006.

However, as more than 95% of all murders are committed by men, it is obviously with men where the main problem lies. Therefore, in any discussion of violence against women, men are needed to help challenge the attitudes and behaviours of those who perpetuate that violence.

I write as the father of two grown up daughters and with many years of being a professional counsellor (with all the necessary safeguards in place) during which time I heard the stories of many women who had been systematically abused, even tortured, by men who should have been protecting them.

Neither will this issue be solved unless we look at some of the wider issues which I will mention later.

But first, compare and contrast the two statements at the top of this piece; there is a great gulf fixed between them is there not? How can these two extremes be bridged?

Some Christians will simply want to focus on the idyllic vision given to Micah and wait for the Lord to return and bring it all about. But I don't believe that point of view impresses God at all; He must surely be concerned by the widespread unease and intimidation felt by half of the people He has made in His image and likeness.

The Women's Aid definition of domestic violence is: -

"An incident, or pattern of incidents, of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violent behaviour including sexual violence, in the majority of cases by a partner or ex-partner, but also by a family member or carer. In the vast majority of cases it is experienced by women and is perpetrated by men.

It can include psychological and/or emotional abuse; financial or economic abuse; harassment and stalking; and online or digital abuse." (www.womensaid.org.uk).

The Bible is not as squeamish on this subject as most Churches and Christians are, so it includes a detailed account of the rape of Tamar by her half-brother Amnon, who was one of King David's sons (2 Samuel 13).

The story contains all the classic and disturbing elements of what happens in these abusive situations: -

Isolation. The man will scheme against and manipulate the woman in order to isolate her from family, friends and any outside interests. In the particular rape situation, Amnon roared, "Send everyone out of here." Over a longer period of time a man may use this tactic of isolation to cause a woman to doubt herself and her instincts.

Intimidation. Along with this isolation he will seek to control the woman through fear.

Lust. I believe that lust, which can be a very powerful driver for men, fuelled as it is by fantasy, testosterone and adrenalin, is controlling more and more men of all ages through pornography. It is a serious, addictive issue, though rarely talked about in this whole debate.

Some pornography involves 'rough sex' where a certain amount of violence is an integral part of 'love-making' and this is influencing male/female intimate relationships and expectations, even among our young people. Extreme pornography may include rape, torture, bestiality and necrophilia. Be warned.

Another influence, also affecting our young people, is gaming. Many games involve violence and killing, and sometimes this fantasy world can carry over into reality. Films and TV can also influence the way women are treated in real life.

Charm. Abusive men switch from being charming one minute to being angry and controlling the next. To outsiders they may appear to be nice, steady, reliable types, but they have a dark side.

Notice how Amnon 'fell in love' with Tamar (lust, actually) but after the rape, he 'hated her with intense hatred'. The deed never matches the fantasy.

Jealousy. Abusive men tend to be very jealous and possessive. He will imagine that she is having affairs and being unfaithful. There will be lots of interrogation and accusation.

Blame. He will excuse his behaviour by blaming it on stress, alcohol, his partner etc.

Promises. After a bout of bad behaviour, the man will promise that it won't happen again.



So why do women stay with abusive men?

The main reasons are, firstly, the woman feels trapped in the situation and has no-one to turn to and nowhere else to go; secondly, she may believe that she will be able to change/help/rescue the man; thirdly, fighting and aggression as a way of resolving conflict may be what she is familiar with, often learned from her family of origin; and fourthly, she may get to a point where her self-esteem is so low that she believes abuse is all she deserves and may even think she is responsible for bringing it upon herself.

So what can we all do, men and women, to make a difference?

- Put violence against women on our Church agendas.

Listen to Charlotte: "I felt I couldn't talk to anyone in the church about my experience of domestic abuse. I didn't know anyone who I could trust enough to believe me or take what I was going through seriously. No-one knew how desperate I felt. It was like I was living in a state where my physical body was operating, but life had been sucked out of me."

- Be angry about this issue but do not sin (Eph. 4:26). Anger is at its best when it originates from compassion towards the vulnerable; it is at its worst when it acts in revenge.
- Find out about and support 'Restored' who work with Churches to end violence against women – www.restored-uk.org

- Lobby the Government and your M.P. over the following: -

~ The need to increase Police resources to combat domestic violence. These services have been cut in recent years and those who remain are under tremendous pressure.

~ Encourage your M.P. to support the Domestic Abuse Bill.

~ Petition the Government to strengthen the Online Harms Bill which deals with pornography.

~ Hold the Government to account over its back-tracking of age verification for access to pornographic sites.

- Remember that simple things can help a woman feel safer e.g. Keep your distance when walking past them outside; if you are a jogger/runner don't run up close behind them - give them space; avoid staring at them or making comments about them.

- Be an active bystander. Two examples of what this may mean: -

One of my daughters was on a train when a man racially abused a woman who was breastfeeding her baby. My daughter got involved, verbally opposing the man and giving support to the woman.

I was once out on our local playing field with two of our children when a violent argument broke out between a couple who were walking across the field. The man got hold of the woman by the throat and wrestled her to the ground.

I shepherded the children away to a safe distance and walked towards the man to let him know I was watching (about 20 yards away). I was praying.

When he saw me, he directed a torrent of verbal abuse at me, but my presence seemed to calm the situation somewhat. Then, in the distance, I heard the faint sound of a police siren. Gradually, the noise got louder and louder and a police car sped across the field and took the man away.

Obviously, each situation is different and we must always try and assess the risk before getting involved, but doing nothing is rarely the best option.

- Use language which makes the man the active agent rather than the woman being the passive recipient e.g. “a man raped a woman” rather than “a woman was raped”; “a man who abuses his wife/girlfriend” rather than “an abusive relationship.”
- Help create support networks for women. Many women, for a variety of reasons, are not able to speak up for themselves and so need the help of other women (and men) to stand with them, alongside them, and empower them.
- Keep this conversation going. Male violence against women thrives on silence and secrecy. In order to keep our daughters safe, we must be able to have the difficult conversations and better educate our menfolk and sons.



As we approach Good Friday, I am reminded of the Cross, a violent act perpetrated by men on a man, where the women watched and wept after the male disciples had fled the scene. Women are no strangers to male violence.

However, it seems to me that only through the Cross of Christ can dividing walls of hostility be broken down, not just between men and women, but between us all. Paradoxically, it is only through Christ's violently shed blood that there can be peace and reconciliation.

And so, we work, we write, we watch, we weep, we wait and on Christ's return we will see an end to Emilia's complaint, the fulfilment of Micah's vision, and the Sarahs of this world will be able to reach home safely.

George Irving – March 2021.