

Domestic Violence-Related Deaths

By Richard L. Davis

What persuades men and women to mistake each other from time to time for gods or vermin is ideology.

Terry Eagleton (1941)

In the introduction of the [2003 Massachusetts Domestic Violence Homicide Report](#) (MDVHR), the authors note, “The human toll from domestic violence is grossly underestimated.” The authors also note:

Domestic violence homicides represent just the tip of the iceberg regarding mortality and morbidity resulting from domestic violence. Suicides that can be attributed to domestic violence deaths that result from life-long battering also need to be examined. Within the category of homicide, alone, it is difficult to claim with any certainty that we were able to identify all domestic violence homicide incidents.

It has become obvious that when the primary focus is on domestic violence homicides (the rarest form of violence) or injurious physical assaults, our ability to completely identify the broad scope and tragic impact of domestic violence victimization is severely limited. The majority of the nationally recognized domestic violence organizations and researchers concur the issue of domestic violence is far more complex and multifaceted than previously thought *and the human toll of its victimization against men has been grossly underestimated.*

The Context of Feminist Ideology

The [Full Report of the Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women](#) notes on page iii, “The data show that violence is more widespread and injurious to women’s and *men’s health* [italics added] than previously thought.” The aforementioned authors also note on page 1, *the majority of contemporary research about violence against women is in the context of [feminist ideology](#).*

The core belief of *feminist ideology* is expressed by the [National Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#) (NCADV):

The NCADV believes violence against women and children results from the use of force or threat to achieve and maintain control over others in intimate relationships, and from societal abuse of power and domination in the forms of sexism, racism, homophobia, classism, anti-Semitism, able-bodyism, ageism and other oppressions.

The NCADV acts as the national voice for domestic violence organizations. As you may note the NCADV does not specifically claim that, all of the above is “caused by men.” However, it does so implicitly by acknowledging only women and children as the victims of domestic violence and ignoring any mention of men as victims. Hence the implication to the reader is that men, who are after all not the victims, must be the “cause” of all the above. Where and when the NCADV finds it is impossible to ignore male victimization, the NCADV then minimize or marginalize male

victimization. The NCADV makes it explicitly clear that the mission of the NCADV and its concerns are only for the safety of “all women and children.”

The NCADV, it appears, also may act as the voice for the majority of our federal and local policy makers. [The 110th Congress H.RES.590](#) is a resolution that purports to raise awareness of domestic violence in the United States and its devastating effects on families and communities. The assumption should be that the 110th Congress is concerned about raising awareness of all victims. Apparently the 110th Congress does not consider men as either family members or victims. If you read their resolution you will discover the 110th Congress minimizes, marginalizes and ignores males’ victimization and when it does mention men they are presented as the abusers. It is difficult to grasp the absolute and utter ignorance displayed by the 110th Congress.

This deep seated [inherent ideological bias](#), that females are the primary victims and males the primary offenders, may be the reason why the media, interveners, public policy makers and the general public have yet to become aware of the negative consequences of [domestic violence against males](#).

The [Violence Against Women Act](#) (VAWA) is not supportive of the exploration of men’s domestic violence victimization. In fact, VAWA research funding and programs often demand that male victimization be ignored. It is argued by many [researchers](#) that VAWA has caused many feminists to replicate the very behavior they railed against in the last century. The VAWA has created biased stereotyping and VAWA has become the nexus of the exclusion of an entire group of people simply because of their gender.

Feminist ideological research, by its very nature, creates an implicit bias which fosters subjective not objective research. In the report [Extent, Nature, and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence](#) the authors conclude on page iv:

These findings [from the National Violence Against Women Survey] support the theory that violence perpetrated against women by intimates is often part of a systematic pattern of dominance and control [by men].

However, examination of their report reveals they present no empirical evidence-based data that can support their conclusion. A thorough examination of the literature reveals that it is evident that ideological researchers often reach subjective rather than objective conclusions despite empirical data to the contrary. This lack of objectivity may be due to firmly held ideological feminist beliefs which create a sympathetic and empathic bonding between the researchers and their subjects.

The Complexities of Domestic Violence

The [Office on Violence Against Women](#) (OVW) notes:

Domestic violence can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviors that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, coerce, threaten, blame, hurt, injure or wound someone.

Clearly all the nationally recognized domestic violence agencies understand that domestic violence can not be measured only through lethality or physical assaults. Psychological abuse can produce emotional victimization that is far more damaging and longer lasting than a physical assault.

The OVW defines that emotional abuse as:

Undermining an individual's sense of self-worth and/or self-esteem. This may include, but is not limited to constant criticism, diminishing one's abilities, name-calling, or damaging one's relationship with *his* or *her* children [italics added].

It is clear here the OVW understands "domestic violence" should not be limited to physical assaults. Furthermore the data document that far more people die from suicide than homicide. The majority of suicides involve male victims. Is it possible that domestic violence research, free of feminist ideology, will demonstrate that emotional abuse and suicides account for far more domestic violence-related deaths than homicides?

This question returns us to page 8, of the MDVHR report which reveals in Utah the majority of the state's 65 domestic violence deaths in 2005 were suicides that did not occur in the context of a homicide. Domestic violence-related death by suicide is a road not traveled by many researchers. Most domestic violence suicides are explored only in the context of a homicide followed by a suicide.

The National Violence Death Reporting System

[The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) is committed to preventing the violent deaths of children, women and men in the United States. The CDC notes that its prevention goal has been and continues *to be hampered by fragmented and incomplete data collection*.

The [National Violent Death Reporting System](#) (NVDRS) is researching, without any apparent bias or agenda, the toll violent deaths takes on individuals, families, and communities in the United States. The NVDRS documents that violent deaths, including homicides and suicides, cost the United States more than \$52 billion in medical care and lost productivity every year.

An April 2008 report by the CDC "[Surveillance for Violent Deaths -- National Violent Death Reporting System, 16 States, 2005](#)" (SVD) provides revealing data collected by the NVDRS. The SVD documents that approximately **30%** of suicides are precipitated by *intimate partner problems*.

The NVDRS collects data about the violent deaths of all victims regardless of age, gender or sexual orientation. The NVDRS data is less fragmented and more complete than any previous data collection of violent deaths. This broad scope of data allows the NVDRS to explore the full scope and in depth, the tragic impact of domestic violence-related deaths.

While approximately twice as many females as males *attempt* suicide, the rate of *completed* suicide in the SVD report is nearly 4 times greater for males than females. [Studies](#) report that many people who commit suicide suffer multiple risk factors, such as clinical depression, mental health disorders and a number of difficult and life altering stressors. Other [studies](#) also document that some of these same risk factors contribute to the multiple causes of many domestic violence homicides.

Table 9, of the SVD reports intimate partner problems (IPProb) precipitated **2,031** of the male and **439** of the female suicides. An [IPProb](#) is defined as a problem with a current or former intimate partner that appears to have contributed to the suicide. Some of the IPProb's are a divorce, break-up, argument [verbal abuse], jealousy, conflict [perhaps physical and verbal] or discord [perhaps psychological or emotional].

In 2005, **32,637** suicides were reported. The SVD reports **30%** of the suicides reported were IPProb related. Hence, it is possible that approximately **7,832** male and **1,958** female suicides were precipitated by intimate partner problems. These intimate partner suicides far exceed the number of intimate partner homicides. When I presented the above data online some readers wondered how many of these intimate partner problem deaths did not demonstrate a direct or indirect association with domestic *violence*. That question needed to be explored.

However, it is important to remember that the OVW acknowledges the *violence* in contemporary domestic *violence* can include “constant criticism, diminishing one’s abilities, name-calling, or damaging one’s relationships with *his* or *her* children.” There is general agreement that females and males are equally capable of exhibiting [this form of violence](#). The NVDRS data appears to reveal that the “conflict” and “discord” found in the “forced leaving” of intimate relationships may be far more lethally dangerous for men than women.

Domestic Violence-Related Deaths

This again brings us to the MDVHR, which in turn directs us to the [2005 Utah Department of Health](#) (UDH) study that reported there were **65** *domestic violence-related deaths* in 2005. The UDH notes there were **44** suicides and **21** homicides.

Six of the suicides were males who killed themselves after committing a homicide. The homicide victims were **10** male and **11** females. The suicide victims were **42** male and **2** female. This data is documented by the UDH, Violence and Injury Prevention Program (VIPP). VIPP gets its information from the Utah Violence Death Reporting System (UTVDRS).

In the following year, 2006, the [Utah Domestic Violence Council](#) (UDVC) did not report the majority of suicides. This is because UDVC only report *domestic violence-related deaths* that appear in public sources; such as newspapers and the electronic media. The UDVC does acknowledge and report the suicides which occur in the context and circumstances of domestic violence incidents are domestic violence-related deaths.

These UDH (2005) report defines the issue of domestic violence as follows:

Domestic violence (DV) is defined as a pattern of behavior used to establish power and control over another person through fear and intimidation, often including the threat or use of violence. This includes violence between family members, roommates, and current or former partners.

For this report, a suicide is considered domestic violence related if one of the circumstances surrounding the suicide involved violence or the threat of violence between intimate partners, family members, or roommates.

Email correspondence with researchers at the Utah Department of Health, Violence and Injury Prevention Program (VIPP) reveal that the reason for the apparent dramatic differences in the number of domestic violence-related deaths as document by the UDH and the UDVC are twofold. One is the definitions they use and the second is their source of information. The data by VIPP comes from the Utah Violence Deaths Reporting System (UTVDRS) which includes medical examiner and police reports. The UTVDRS data is a lengthy process that can take up to 18 months to complete. The UDVC reports only public media information at the end of each year.

The VIPP researchers did clarify that suicides defined as domestic-*violence* related fatalities are reported for incidents only when there is actual *violence* or the threat of *violence* surrounding the incident. These domestic *violence*-related deaths *do not include* incidents where there was only a verbal argument or a separation.

On the front page of the [2006 Utah Domestic Violence Related Deaths](#) it found, “These troubling statistics document, in summary form, the broad scope and tragic impact of domestic violence in Utah.” What *should be apparent* to the UDVC is that exploring domestic violence-related deaths only in summary form provides a very limited examination of the problem.

The authors of the MDVHR are correct to note in its introduction, “The domestic violence homicides and suicides that are reported in the public print and electronic media represent just the tip of the iceberg regarding mortality and morbidity resulting from domestic violence.” They are right. The NVDRS may reveal more of that iceberg as more states join the effort.

It is the goal of the NVDRS to develop a national system that actually can, in an unbiased and non-ideological process, document *the broad scope and tragic impact of domestic violence*. For now the data is only reported from 17 states. And Utah is the only state, to my knowledge, that has published a more complete picture of the tragic impact domestic violence has on men, women and children. Let us hope that before long, the NVDRS will set truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth free from contemporary, fragmented and incomplete ideological research.

Perception and Polarization

Many of the national recognized domestic violence organizations and researchers who write about domestic violence from a feminist ideological perception argue that some men’s rights groups are guilty of extracting only data from studies that present their perception that men and women are equally guilty of domestic violence. A review of the literature documents this is true.

However, the vast majority of the national recognized domestic violence organizations, for decades, have done the same. It is written ubiquitously that around the world, [1 in 3 women](#) has been beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused in her lifetime. A unbiased review of the literature documents that when researchers use the same methodology used in gathering that data, the data will reveal the same is approximately true for 1 in 3 men.

It is now written ubiquitously that, [1 in 5 female high school students](#) report being physically and/or sexually abused by a dating partner. An unbiased review of the literature documents that when researchers use the same methodology used in gathering dating violence data, the data will reveal the same is approximately true for male high school students.

It is a fact, if one reviews the literature, that the nationally recognized domestic violence organizations, similar to the NCADV, have for decades now, been presenting only data that favors their perspective and their concerns. And when an organization similar to the NCADV does so, while it may not be an honest presentation, it is understandable why the NCADV does so. The NCADV is only concerned, as its website clearly documents, with women and children.

It is far less understandable when our public policy makers do the same. I think that most people believe that our public policy makers should be equally concerned about males and females. House resolution 590 and the VAWA are just two of many examples of where our policy makers are placing their concerns about females before males.

On March 11, 2009 President Obama announced the formation of a [White House Council on Women and Girls](#). As the father of three daughters and two sons, I would like to commend President Obama for establishing a council that is intended to provide a coordinated federal response to the challenges that my daughters will confront in this 21st century.

However, as the father of three daughters and two sons, I find it impossible to understand why President Obama believes it is not necessary to establish a council that is intended to provide a coordinated federal response to the challenges that my sons will confront in this 21st century.

Does President Obama believe that my sons are living in the promised land and my daughters are not? The White House Council on Women and Girls is being established to ensure that agencies across the federal government, not just a few offices, take into account the *particular needs* and concerns of women and girls. I would like to suggest a few of the particular needs and concerns of men and boys.

Our sons are growing up in a society and government that both focus on the familial victimization of [females](#) over males. Our sons are growing up in a society where far more males than females are [dropping out of high school](#). Our sons are growing up in a society where [almost 60% of students entering college are female](#). Our sons are growing up in a society where [males serve longer prison sentences](#) than females. Our sons are growing up in a society where [women live longer than men](#). Our sons are growing up in a society where far more [males are tanking their own lives more than females](#). And sadly, this is only a partial list of some of our son's particular needs and concerns.

Those of us who voted for President Obama did so for a variety of reasons, however, the most prominent reason was we believed we were voting for change. Perhaps President Obama might consider a White House Council on Men and Boys that would meet regularly to serve as a forum for all involved federal agencies to focus on helping our sons as well as our daughters.

Conclusion

Perhaps neither contemporary dueling positions [men are more violent than women vs. men and women are equally responsible for domestic violence] in the academe or those working in the field will find solace in the NVDRS findings.

[Homicide Trends in the United States](#) and other data clearly document that men commit more lethal violence than women. However, NVDRS data documents that the vast majority of lethality, both inside and outside the home, is directed at other men or themselves. Given the OVW definition of

domestic *violence*, it becomes impossible to responsibly claim that females do not commit at least an equal amount of that type of *violence*. What has not been recognized until now, as the NVDRS data demonstrates, is that it appears the majority of domestic *violence*-related deaths are suffered by males not females. The question that now must be explored is how much of the female *violence* is responsible or at least a factor for the high rate of domestic *violence*-related deaths suffered by males.

Researchers Evan Stark and Anne Flitcraft have suggested that some women are driven to suicide because of power and control issues. Women request and are issued restraining orders far more often than men and women initiate divorce or separation more often than men. Restraining orders and divorces are most often based on perceptions of those involved rather than empirical evidence-based data.

It is most often men who lose the children, the home, and perhaps their sense of self-worth and/or self-esteem along with being ordered to pay alimony and child support. All of the above are issues that include emotional and psychological life altering stressors that may depress some men and drive some to suicide because they now have lost everything they have worked for.

And if that divorce follows years of constant criticism, diminishing one's abilities, name-calling, followed by the issuance of a restraining order that often damages a man's relationship with his children, this behavior might fit the OVW definition of "abuse." Most often society views the divorce process as "a person's right to choose" and [rarely is that process viewed as "abusive behavior."](#)

These findings join the ever growing list of data that document domestic violence-related fatalities *are a problem* for adult heterosexual women. However, the NCDRS reveals that domestic violence-related fatalities *are not exclusively or primarily* a problem for adult heterosexual women.

Also fatality reviews and NVDRS data clearly document that the deaths inside and outside of home, regardless of age, gender or sexual orientation have far more complex and multifaceted causes than sexism and oppression.

It was the MDVHR that led me to the Utah report and the CDC to the NVDRS. The MDVHR clearly documents, despite the inability or unwillingness of the authors to recognize it even when they report it, the many multifaceted complexities, contexts and unreasoned or irrational circumstances and happenstances of domestic violence homicides.

The MDVHR authors conclude that social norms (although their report does not specify or acknowledge what these social norms are), are the primary cause for these horrific homicides. This subjective conclusion lacks any evidence-based data in their report and probably rests on the dated mid-20th century hypothesis that violence against women is exclusively or primarily caused by sexism and the oppression of women.

The report from the National Research Council, [Advancing the Federal Research Agenda on Violence Against Women](#) concludes:

Finally, there is emerging and credible evidence that the general origins and behavioral patterns of various forms of violence, such as male violence against women and men and female violence against men and women, may be similar.

Perhaps the NVDRS data will set some researchers, domestic violence interveners and policy makers free from concluding they have already discovered the single correct answer to this enigma which continues to plague children, women and men.

Although this is only a 6 page paper, because of the hyperlinks, it actually contains hundreds of studies and reams of data used to reach the above conclusions. For those who have received this paper in a traditional hard copy I have provided URL's after the hyperlinks that will allow you access the information on a computer.

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