



## Understanding Domestic Violence

with [Richard Davis, ALM](#)

# The many different faces of domestic violence

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The recent murder/suicide of Tacoma Chief David Brame and his wife Crystal have stimulated many diverse views of just what domestic violence is, what causes it, and what police departments should do about it.

Public policy is often driven by dramatic events such as the above murder/suicide or the “battered” victim that officers too often discover when they respond to a domestic violence call. However, for law enforcement officers domestic violence has many different faces.

Many deliberations about contemporary domestic violence interventions are so contentious they actually hinder not help progress. These contentious deliberations are most often the result of the fact that domestic violence remains different things to different people. Research professionals, domestic violence advocates, and police officers continue to view domestic violence in dramatically diverse ways.

In early 1960, Dr. C. H. Kempe coined the term “battered child syndrome.” Society, after many failed attempts, began to accept that the majority of child abuse was not committed by strangers nor was it a problem only for “those at the lower end of the socioeconomic educational strata.” Many guilty of abusing children were their parents or other caretakers in the home.

It is universally agreed and unbiased data document that, concerning physical child abuse, males and females perpetrate equal levels of nonsexual abuse. This generally accepted accord

allows a consensus that has helped facilitate progress.

The majority of contemporary domestic violence advocates who work with battered women assert that 95% of the victims are women and 5% men. Data from the National Institute of Justice document that 85% of the victims who report domestic violence incidents are women and 15% men. The National Violence against Women Survey reports that approximately two thirds of victims are women and one third men. The National Family Violence Surveys report that men and women abuse each other at approximately the same rate.

Harvey Wallace in his book, *Family Violence: Legal, Medical, and Social Perspectives*, writes on page 3, "How does one accurately study or research a phenomenon if a definition cannot be agreed on because the definition of any act both sets limits and focuses research with certain boundaries."

None of the above data concerning percentage differences are indisputable facts nor are those who hold them to be true, wrong to do so. They are simply reflections of the reality that the majority of researchers, professionals, and advocates do not acknowledge a universal definition of domestic violence.

Regardless of this lack of agreement by researchers, professionals and advocates there is a universal definition of domestic violence. Domestic violence by civil and criminal statute law in all fifty states is child, sibling, spousal, intimate partner, and elder abuse. Domestic violence is not singularly and specifically violence against women nor is it only and exclusively "battering" behavior between adult heterosexual males and females. Too often contemporary domestic violence training does not reflect that reality.

The majority of contemporary domestic violence educational and training programs sponsored by the National Institute of Justice and/or the Violence Against Women Office are often limited to "battering behavior." It is in the best interest of our public policy makers, the criminal justice system, advocates and victims to recognize that the majority of domestic violence calls officers respond to do not involve "battering behavior."

The majority of researchers and professionals agree that multifaceted causes require different and distinct interventions. Research into the cause and consequences of domestic violence should not and cannot be limited by any "single ideological theory" or any "one label fits all" intervention.

Most researchers and professionals agree there are three principal models, each containing many sub groupings, that attempt to explain the reason why many who profess to love and care for each other often choose to neglect, abuse and batter their spouse, partner, or child.

### **The Feminist or Cognitive-Behavioral model**

This approach explains that domestic violence mirrors the patriarchal organization of society









