

## Fact Sheet 3 Perpetrator characteristics<sup>1</sup>

Perpetrators of family and domestic violence can vary in age and be from any socio-economic demographic, cultural background, ethnicity or religion. They can occupy any profession or live in any geographic region. Perpetrators can be any gender, however, the vast majority are male (Bagshaw & Chung 2000).

Risk assessment and risk management must be underpinned by an understanding of common perpetrator behaviours.

### Tactics

To effectively respond to family and domestic violence, it is important to understand the tactics used by perpetrators including those adopted to hurt and/or frighten victims (coercion) and those designed to isolate and/or regulate them (control). Perpetrators of family and domestic violence are very much in control of these behaviours and are ultimately the only ones that have the capacity to change the situation (No to Violence 2005).

Perpetrators can be good at hiding the violence, publicly presenting as kind, loving, charming and likeable, but behave in cruel, violent, undermining and manipulative ways in private.

Some of the common tactics used by perpetrators to coerce and control victims are shown in the following table.

**Table 1: Tactics used by perpetrators to control victims**

Tactics	Examples
Isolation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>causing fear through threats;</li><li>glares;</li><li>destroying property; and</li><li>hurting pets.</li></ul>
Undermining	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>damaging self-esteem through humiliation, ridicule, and shaming; and</li><li>intentional behaviours that make the victim doubt herself.</li></ul>
Using children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>telling the victim she is a bad mother;</li><li>using access to harass or assault her;</li><li>threatening to take the children away;</li><li>coercing the victim to get pregnant;</li><li>threatening to harm the children or engaging in risky behaviour with them; and</li><li>making the child watch or participate in the abuse.</li></ul>

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from: *Perpetrator accountability in Child Protection Practice – A resource for child protection workers about engaging and responding to men who perpetrate family and domestic violence*, Department for Child Protection, Government of Western Australia, 2013.

<p>I . a</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• preventing the victim from working;</li> <li>• cutting her off from her friends or family; and</li> <li>• physically preventing her from leaving the house.</li> </ul>
<p>M. a a a d . a</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• saying it was 'only' a slap or that the victim is overreacting;</li> <li>• blaming alcohol/ stress/unemployment;</li> <li>• mitigating behaviour by downplaying the damage and injury;</li> <li>• providing inconsistent accounts; and</li> <li>• using loss of control as an excuse.</li> </ul>
<p>R a a a a a a a a</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• excusing behaviour as self-defence, rough play or an accident; and</li> <li>• by using language like 'incident' or 'fight' to make the violence appear mutual.</li> </ul>
<p>V a</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• telling the victim that she asked for it or she provoked him;</li> <li>• avoiding or attempting to divide responsibility for violence;</li> <li>• accusing the victim of a different form of violence for example emotional abuse; and</li> <li>• focusing attention on her 'inability to cope' and 'neglect of her children' when women have reverted to substance abuse or have developed anxiety-based disorders as a result of this violence.</li> </ul>
<p>U a</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• expecting sex on demand;</li> <li>• demanding that the victim does all the cooking and housework;</li> <li>• controlling all the money;</li> <li>• making all the 'big decisions'; and</li> <li>• excusing excessive jealousy and violence.</li> </ul>
<p>S a a</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sexually assaulting or raping the victim;</li> <li>• keeping the victim pregnant; and</li> <li>• blackmailing the victim with intimate knowledge or photographs.</li> </ul>
<p>P. a a a a</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• threatening to hurt or kill adult or child victims;</li> <li>• crying and emotional blackmail;</li> <li>• stalking the victim;</li> <li>• threatening to kill himself; and</li> <li>• threatening to make reports to Centrelink, Immigration and Child Protection if the victim ends the relationship or reports the abuse.</li> </ul>

## Choice and intent

Perpetrators of family and domestic violence are responsible for, and make decisions about their use of violence. This is demonstrated in the fact that perpetrators are rarely indiscriminately violent. Many perpetrators are not violent in their workplaces, social networks or communities but choose when, where and how they use violence.

Further examples include:

- The perpetrator might suddenly change his behaviour from violent to pleasant in the middle of an abusive episode if someone comes to the door or the phone rings, but then resume it again afterwards.
- The perpetrator threatens future violence if the victim does not do what he wants her to.
- The perpetrator makes purposeful decisions about the type, not about caaa

## A note about perpetrator accountability

Engagement with perpetrators should include reinforcing that he is solely responsible for his choice to use violence, informing him about the consequences and impacts of his actions, challenging him to accept responsibility, and assisting him to seek help to change his behaviour.

Working in an integrated way with other services to hold the perpetrator accountable can assist with supplementing risk assessment and obtaining information relevant to risk management and victim safety.

The Department for Child Protection and Family Support resource, *Perpetrator Accountability in Child Protection Practice – A resource for child protection workers about engaging and responding to men who perpetrate family and domestic violence* provides a range of information and practice tips to guide working with men perpetrating family and domestic violence.

## References

Bagshaw D & Chung D 2000, *Women, Men and Domestic Violence*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

No to Violence 2005, *Men's Behaviour Change group work: A Manual for quality practice*, No to Violence, Melbourne.

Department for Child Protection 2013, *Perpetrator accountability in Child Protection Practice – A resource for child protection workers about engaging and responding to men who perpetrate family and domestic violence*, Government of Western Australia, Perth.