

## Male victims of domestic violence among professional families: Shackled in masculinity

### Laki-laki korban kekerasan dalam rumah tangga di kalangan keluarga profesional: Terbelenggu dalam maskulinitas

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#### Abstract

Various acts of domestic violence are the reality that troubles family life in various social classes. This study seeks to investigate violence experienced by men among professional families and the causes of women to commit such act. This study deployed qualitative methods and conducted in-depth interviews of 53 informants. The finding of the study indicates that men not only experience single violence, but a variation of violence that occurred in professional families, such as physical, economic, verbal/psychological, and sexual violence. This study shows the triggers for women to commit violence against men among professional families are insecurity, jealousy, and inequality in socioeconomic status. Men are burdened with patriarchy and tend to be passive in reacting to the violence they experience. Masculinity makes male victims of violence suffer triple oppression: They become the victims; they are embarrassed because they get a negative stigma from the community for failing and not being able to lead their families; and when men become the victims, they 'get punished' because it is considered as 'abnormal' for men to become victims of violence. Men react to the violence committed by their wives by carrying out latent resistance, manifest resistance, and alienation.

**Keywords:** domestic violence; female perpetrator; male victims; professional family

#### Abstrak

*Berbagai tindak kekerasan dalam rumah tangga menjadi kenyataan yang meresahkan kehidupan keluarga di berbagai kelas sosial. Penelitian ini berupaya untuk mengungkap kekerasan yang dialami laki-laki di kalangan keluarga profesional dan pemicu perempuan melakukan tindakan tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dan melakukan wawancara mendalam terhadap 53 informan. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa laki-laki tidak hanya mengalami kekerasan tunggal, namun kekerasan yang terjadi dalam keluarga profesional bervariasi, yaitu kekerasan fisik, ekonomi, verbal/psikologis, dan seksual. Studi ini menunjukkan pemicu tindak kekerasan terhadap laki-laki di kalangan keluarga profesional adalah rasa tidak aman, kecemburuan, dan kesenjangan status sosial ekonomi. Laki-laki terbebani dengan patriarki dan cenderung pasif dalam menyikapi kekerasan yang dialaminya. Maskulinitas membuat laki-laki korban kekerasan mengalami tiga kali penindasan: Mereka menjadi korban; mereka malu karena mendapat stigma negatif dari masyarakat karena gagal dan tidak mampu memimpin keluarga; dan ketika laki-laki menjadi korban, mereka 'dihukum' karena dianggap 'tidak normal' jika laki-laki menjadi korban kekerasan. Laki-laki bereaksi terhadap kekerasan yang dilakukan istrinya dengan melakukan perlawanan laten, perlawanan nyata, dan keterasingan.*

**Kata kunci:** kekerasan dalam rumah tangga; pelaku perempuan; korban laki-laki; keluarga profesional

## Introduction

Gender equality and impartiality are easier to attain in a professional family, because women and men have the same opportunities in achieving education and professional employment. However, in reality, gender inequality is still common, even among professionals. Various acts of domestic violence are the reality that troubles family life in various social classes. A study on violence among professional families is rarely done. Of those few, most examine women as victims. There are even fewer studies that discuss violence committed by women against men. Domestic violence is a violation of formal law. In Indonesia, regulation on domestic violence is stipulated in Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 23 of 2004 on the eradication of domestic violence. Under the law, the state guarantees and protects victims of domestic violence and takes measures against perpetrators of domestic violence.

Domestic violence is an important issue to be exposed in more depth because families are responsible to educate, instill values and norms in individuals. Reality shows that domestic violence still occurs, not only among the lower social class but also in the upper-middle class. Women are not the only ones who become victims of violence; men also experience such violence. Previous studies have shown that experiences of violence affect the actions and behaviors of individuals in their adulthood. One study shows that women commit violence because they have previous experiences of violence (Schroffel 2004, Rivara et al. 2019). Women being abusive and violent towards men are affected by inter-parental aggression (their experience of seeing the father hurt the mother), love, self-esteem, and influence of alcohol (Caetano et al. 2000, Lewis 2002, Chase et al. 2003, Stuart et al. 2006, Goldenson 2009, Hines 2009, Sarmiento 2019).

Some studies explain that women commit violence as vengeance for being victims, and as an effort to maintain personal freedom (Kernsmith 2005, True 2020), to defend themselves (Babcock et al. 2005, Dutton et al. 2013, Whitaker 2013, Carlyle et al. 2014, Hiltz 2018, Lasky 2019, Boxall et al. 2020, Walker et al. 2022), and also to protect their children (Yourstone et al. 2008, Stewart et al. 2014, Caman et al. 2016). Female perpetrators of domestic violence have anti-social personalities and psychological and physical aggression, where they report to experience anxiety (Weizmann-Henelius 2006, Zacarias et al. 2012, McKeown 2014). Other previous studies have shown that violence can be committed by both men and women (Stets & Straus 1990, Johnson 1995, Headey et al. 1999, Johnson & Ferraro 2000, Swan & Snow 2002, Gelles 2007, Kelly & Johnson 2008, Cook 2009, Straus 2011, Goodmark 2018, Lien 2019). So far, there have not been many studies on violence perpetrated by women against men. Thureau (2015) conducted a retrospective study of male and female victims of violence. The study shows that men experience lighter physical injuries than women, and psychological effects are more often found in women than men. The study shows that men experience lighter physical injuries than women, and psychological effects are more often found in women than men. Violence by women against men is an 'unusual' thing where women behave rudely which leads to physical and emotional violence against men (Hogan 2016).

Unlike women, men find it difficult to disclose the violence they experience. The help they are looking for entails a negative emotional impact on men (Machado et al. 2016). The reaction of authorities is also different for male victims of domestic violence. The police will only arrest the perpetrators if the victims experience severe violence and injuries (Cho et al. 2010). This is inseparable from the patriarchal culture of the society and the dominating masculinity. Dominant culture places men as superior to women. Many men who experience violence do not report the incidents. Men who experience domestic violence feel ashamed that their masculine identity is compromised and becoming different from the dominant culture of the society (Allen-Collinson 2009, Hogan 2016, Scarduzio 2016, Lee & Lincoln 2017). Men are even accused as the perpetrators if they report the violence they experience (Hogan 2016), so they tend not to report violence that happened to them, making data on violence committed by women inadequate (Dowd 2001). In addition, violence perpetrated by women receives less attention in society because of the perception that men are more capable of hurting women and female victims may be more likely to suffer serious injuries, this is correlated with gender role stereotypes (Seelau & Seelau 2005, Davies et al. 2006, Hassouneh et al. 2008, Soselisa et al. 2022).

So far, there are not many studies of women perpetrated domestic violence that has been studied sociologically. Therefore, this study seeks to expose how violence is experienced by men among professional families. In professional families, the wives have the same opportunities as the husbands in terms of education and professional work. Sociological research that seeks to highlight violence against men among professional families is still very rare. This study wants to expose further the triggers of violence perpetrated by women against men in dual-career families and how men can be victims of violence in the context of patriarchal Javanese society. Patriarchy in Javanese society has been firmly rooted for centuries (Abdullah 2006). This study also seeks to uncover the norms held by these men so that they are willing to maintain the marriage despite experiencing domestic violence.

## Research Method

This study used qualitative methods and conducted in Surabaya, the second-largest city in Indonesia, in which most of the residents are Javanese. The subjects of the study were men and women with professional careers, including company managers, teachers, lecturers, bureaucrats, and private sector

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employees who experienced violence. Men and women who became subjects in the study had spouses who also had professional careers.

Informants in this study were collected using snowball. There were 53 informants: Men who became victims and women who became perpetrators of violence. The researchers also interviewed the supporting informants, namely families, friends, neighbors, and colleagues of the victims. Data were collected using in-depth interviews with the informants. The study also conducted data triangulation and collected supporting data through interviews with the supporting informants to minimize bias. Data were analyzed by transcribing and categorizing based on the researched issue. Categorized data were then analyzed, interpreted, abstracted, and discussed with previous studies and theories relevant to the research's focus.

## **Result and Discussion**

The discussion of this study focuses on two things: First, a discussion related to triggers of women's violence against men among professional families. Second, discussions relate to forms of violence and the husbands' reaction toward the violence of the wives among professional families.

### **Triggers of women's violence against men among professional families**

This study finds several triggering factors for women to commit violence against men. One of the triggers is insecurity. The insecurity of female violence perpetrators is a projection of fear of losing their partners because the husbands have higher socioeconomic status. The wives try to bind their husbands by committing violence to hold the husband within their grasp. One of the informants stated: "She controls my social media. She's afraid that I would leave her and be with another woman. She realizes that since she knows I have work relations with a lot of people at the office."

Because of this fear of abandonment by the spouse and to conceal such helplessness, the wives commit violence against their husbands. The husbands' social network at the workplace makes the wives feel insecure, which later leads them to try to control their husbands through violence. WAT admitted that she checked her husband's smartphone while he was sleeping. She did that to control her husband's behavior at the office. She did that because she followed what her friends said. WAT stated:

"Yes, sometimes I opened his smartphone. Not a big deal. Men must be suspected. In case he's up to something. Every day he meets female students, patients. Young and beautiful. That's why I groomed myself. When he's asleep, sometimes I checked his phone. My friends say that a wife must know what her husband is doing." (Informant WAT).

What Wat revealed shows that she felt insecure about her position. Her husband's good career makes it highly likely for him to meet many women. She was afraid of losing her husband. For this reason, Wat tried to control her husband's behavior outside the house by looking at and checking her husband's social media. Jealousy also triggers the wives to commit violence against their husbands, as what BAG told:

"My wife is also very jealous. She's jealous of my work and my coworkers. She knows my past: that I dated my ex for a long time. While with her, I knew her, and then we immediately got married. When I go out of town or abroad for business, she gets angry. She says I'm more concerned with my job. She says how come she gets to work by herself while I'm having fun abroad. She would be suspicious of where I'm going and with whom. It's painful for me. Sometimes I don't even like to travel. I don't feel like going because I'm thinking about her. What would become of her by herself if there's a blackout? I think about that. But she always has negative thoughts, grumbling and making wild accusations. Yes, I think she's afraid that I would leave her." (Informant BAG).

Inequality in socioeconomic status also triggers women to commit violence against their husbands. The study finds that men who become victims of such violence have higher education than their wives. In addition, these men also have jobs that are considered to be more prestigious than those of the wives, for example, the man is a medical doctor with a doctorate while the wife is an employee of a private company with a bachelor's degree.

Previous studies have shown that women being abusive and violent towards men are affected by interparental aggression (the experience of seeing their fathers hurt their mothers), love, self-esteem, and influence of alcohol (Lewis et al. 2002, Goldenson et al. 2009, Hines et al. 2009, Taylor et al, 2021). Other studies show that women commit violence in a relationship because of previous experiences of violence—as a form of revenge for previously being victims, to maintain personal freedom, and gain power and control (Kernsmith 2005). The main reason for women to attack men is to defend themselves or to act reactive (Babcock et al. 2005, Babcock et al. 2018). Previous studies have also shown various reasons for women to commit violence against men. This current study further identifies some of these triggers that have not been revealed by previous researches, namely insecurity, the wives' jealousy, and inequality in the socioeconomic status of the couple.

This study finds dissimilarities from previous studies on women committing violence against men which show that the involvement of women in intimate partner violence is caused by, among others, poverty (Barreto & Ellemers 2005, Reckdenwald & Parker 2008, Whitaker 2013). This study shows that among professional families, both perpetrators and victims are in financially well-established positions where both the husbands and the wives have jobs and professional careers (with career paths). What triggers the wives to commit violence against their husbands is not the effort to defend themselves from violence committed by their husbands, nor it is a form of revenge, but rather insecurity—an overwhelming fear of losing their spouses. In addition, jealousy and the socioeconomic status of the couple also trigger women to commit violence. Professionally working men with good positions at work renders the wives jealous. The wives' jealousy does not only toward other women, be it the husbands' coworkers or acquaintances, but also toward the husbands' achieving social status. The extent of the husbands' social network also adds to the jealousy of the wives. When the husbands exhibit a success, the wives get jealous because they are unable to surpass the husbands' success in their careers.

This study strengthens previous studies that suggest that women who are abusive and violent towards men are influenced by, among others, love and self-esteem (Lewis et al. 2002, Goldenson et al. 2009, Hines et al. 2009, Turan & Duy 2020). In line with those studies, this study further reveals various triggers for women to commit violence against their husbands. The fear of being cheated on, abandoned, ignored by the husband, and fear of losing the love of the husband make the wives try to exercise control in such a way by committing violence in the hope to dominate the husband. The husbands' achievements in social, educational, and financial status trigger the wives to commit violence, including verbal/psychological, physical, economic, and sexual violence. This study finds that female perpetrators of violence generally have lower education and social status than their husbands. In contrast, it is the male victims of violence who are more educated and have higher social status at work compared to their wives.

### **Forms of violence and the husbands' reaction toward the violence of the wives among professional families**

This study finds four variations of violence perpetrated by women against men, namely: physical, psychological/verbal, economic, and sexual. This study shows that men not only experience single violence, many of them even experience various forms of violence at once, a combination of physical, psychological/verbal, economic, and sexual violence. Another previous study has shown the form of violence committed by women is being rude that leads to physical and emotional abuse to partners (Hogan 2016, Bates 2020, Enge 2023). Adding to the finding of that study, this study on professional families finds that violence experienced by men is not only in the form of physical and emotional abuse but also economic and sexual violence.

The physical violence experienced by men is getting bitten and slapped. The verbal/psychological violence includes being cursed at, yelled at, called names, ridiculed, demeaned/said to be useless, mocked, unappreciated, disrespected, ignored, overly suspected, said to have no riches, and having their phone checked. Economic violence includes being forced and demanded to satisfy the tertiary needs of the wives, and forced to work overtime to fulfill the wishes of the wives. Sexual violence includes squeezing and injuring genitals. These men also experience sexual rejection and rejection of their sexual

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needs. WAN (49 years old) experienced psychological/verbal violence. He said that his wife is unkind, disrespectful of her husband, and very dominant in the family. His wife never discusses things with him, making all the decisions by herself. He stated, "I'm never asked to talk. My wife deals with everything. She's evil. I have never been respected. But what else can I do? We're married and have children."

DON (42 years old) experiences three forms of violence: Physical, psychological/verbal, and economic. DON's wife is a teacher but she is very temperamental. When she's angry, his wife breaks things at home. DON often gets bitten and slapped by his wife. His wife also has excessive economic demands. She likes to waste money. Psychologically, DON is often scolded at, humiliated, mocked, and called names by his wife. DON revealed: "She's awful when she's angry. She slams things, bites me, and slaps me. She grumbles, saying that I'm useless, no good, and whatnots. She likes to spend money. The money I give here is never enough."

This study is different from previous studies which suggest that acts of violence committed by women against men are the same as what they get from their partners: beatings by women are considered to be proportional to the discomfort they feel (Ho 2003, Bahati et al. 2022). This study on professional families finds that it is the husbands who are the ones who feel discomfort and become victims of violence. The husbands experience psychological discomfort from various verbal/psychological violence from their wives, the wives' excessive economic demands that exceed the husbands' financial ability, and being denied of their sexual needs.

This study found that the sexual violence they experienced was the injury to their genitals by their wives. In a patriarchal society, men consider denial of sexual needs and requests to be a form of sexual violence. The wives no longer accept their husbands' sexual requests. Every time the husbands ask for sex, the wives refuse, saying that they're tired. The wives also never initiate sex. Men consider this as sexual violence, as the husbands' sexual needs are denied for months or even years. LUK stated: "I never force her. If she feels uncomfortable, I'd notice. If she's in pain, I'd stop. But she never has initiative. She just lets me do it." LUK's supporting informant confirmed, "We still have sex, but very rarely, not even once a month." LUK never forces his wife to have sex. Pretty much the same as LUK, END also stated that it has been years since he had sex with his wife. END revealed:

"She has never cared about me for a long time. It's been years. If I ask her for sex during weekdays, she'd say that she's tired. She suggests weekends, instead. If I ask her on weekends, she'd say she's not in the mood. I remain patient, but she doesn't seem to care. I finally gave up asking her for sex. And to me, as a man, when she denies my request, I consider her to be demeaning and disrespectful." (Informant END).

In professional families in which men become victims of violence, husbands who are denied sex by their wives consider it as sexual violence. The informants never force their wives into sex, but their requests are also never heeded. END said:

"It's been more than a year. I forget exactly when, but it's been years. Well, I never ask anymore. I had enough. Her rejection is painful for me. How come she rejects me. She's obliged to accept. The reasons are, either she's tired, or suggest other than weekdays. On weekends, she wouldn't have the time and many other reasons." (Informant END).

LUK claimed to have lost his passion for his wife. "In terms of intimacy, we don't connect. In having sex, for example, she's not in the mood nor tries to be in the mood. I'm disappointed. I never force her". END also has pretty much the same as LUK. END revealed:

"Traumatized for being rejected, I chose not to ask. At home, although we share the bed, I've lost the desire to do that. I once told her that if she denies me, I'll marry another woman. She replies: Well, go get married, then! What woman would want to be with you, with all the wealth in my control? Well, I just accept it. Just go with the flow. What can I do? Divorce is not an option. None of my family get divorced. What would people say if I get a divorce? How come a doctor gets divorced? How about the kids? Getting a divorce will always be considered negative by others." (Informant END).

According to the informant, the wife's refusal to have sex is a form of violence since it hurts his feeling, and makes him feel disrespected, demeaned, underestimated, and harassed. The wife's repeated refusals result in the feeling of being disrespected as a man. However, the victim does not react aggressively to what is done by his wife. Masculinity is the dominant culture in the very patriarchal Javanese society. Violence against men is considered uncommon, making it difficult for men, as compared to women, to communicate the violence they experienced (Thureau 2015, Hine et al. 2022). The violence of women against men is controversial and is not common (Hogan 2016). However, this study in professional families can further and deeper reveal the violence experienced by men qualitatively.

This study identifies various reactions of husbands who experienced domestic violence by their wives. The husbands' reactions can be considered as their resistance against violence committed by their wives. These resistances are in the form of latent resistance, manifest resistance, and alienation. Latent resistance includes: giving the silent treatment, not accompanying the wives to go shopping, reducing the intensity of communication with the wives, having relationships with other women, and keeping secret of additional jobs and income they get. Manifest resistance includes: not having sex, not caring about the wives, and even sleeping in different beds. In addition to latent and manifest resistance, the husbands also react to violence by their wives by alienating: isolating themselves (getting away from their wives) and dismissing the wives' access to the husbands' social media.

In professional families, for men who become victims of violence, the social status becomes one of the factors that makes the victims stay in their marriages. The victims choose to endure to maintain the reputation and good name of the family. Society considers marriage to be successful if it can create a harmonious family. This discourse creates social pressure that restrains the victims, forcing them to endure whatever happens. Although these men experience violence in their marriages, they prefer to stay in these unhealthy marriages. Whatever the marital conditions may be, men want to look strong, happy, and able to lead the family well, as dictated by the dominant discourse in the society. Men do not want to appear weak, even those who become victims of violence, so they tend to conceal the violence they experienced.

Previous studies have shown that men who become victims of intimate partner violence face difficulties in seeking help because of the differences between male and female victims. In addition, the help they are looking for has a negative emotional impact on men (Machado 2016, Taylor et al. 2021). The police will only arrest female perpetrators if the victims experience severe violence and injury (Cho 2010, Kravvariti & Browne 2023). Thus, most of the time, men would stay silent when experiencing violence.

In professional families, men rarely want to disclose their violence-filled marriage. Masculinity has framed men to act according to their status as husbands who become leaders in the family. Instead of reporting violence to the authorities, men tend to keep the violence secret, even to close relatives. If people know about the violence they experience, it may harm their social status and reputation in society.

A retrospective study conducted by Thureau (2015) of male and female victims of violence shows that men consult less frequently compared to women. This study on professional families finds that men tend to hide the violence they experience. This study reinforces previous studies that show that men who experience violence by women feel their masculine identity disappears and express a feeling of embarrassment for not complying with the dominant culture in the society (Allen-Collinson 2009, Hogan 2016, Scarduzio et al. 2016).

Furthermore, this study on professional families finds that men, too, are distressed by patriarchy which places them in a superior position and requires them to be good leaders. It is precise because of the discourse and norms that develop in the society that places men as the dominant class that men tend to be passive in reacting to violence and do nothing about it. For men, the social status of the family is the most important thing to be maintained regardless of the condition. Men are reluctant to get a divorce. They do not want to lose their social status, so for them, it is better to live in violence than getting a divorce.

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This study strengthens Geertz's study (1983) in Javanese society, where he describes the ideal family as a family consisting of parents and children, in which the husband or the wife is the most important person in life. The family provides emotional well-being, balance in social orientation, moral guidance, assistance, education on cultural values. The family also becomes the place where socialization takes place for the individuals.

This study on professional families shows that Indonesians still have a discourse of ideal family discourse that places great importance on social harmony. Based on Foucault's thoughts in *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault 1975), individuals are disciplined and normalized to act in accordance with what is expected by the dominant society. In this context, individual actions are influenced by the discourse of the ideal family and normalized to achieve social harmony. Every individual is normalized so that family harmony is realized and divorce is avoided as much as possible. If it fails, there will be social punishment in the form of mockery, scorn, and gossip from the community which then creates a negative stigma. People often label a divorce as negative, especially in professional families which are often used as exemplary figures, role models, and examples of harmonious families in the community. There is still a perception in society that a divorce indicates the inability to perform a role, manage, and organize a family. Individuals are confined by discourse that becomes 'panoptic' and normalization that is strengthened by such 'panoptic' where individuals are required to act according to what is considered normal in the society.

The current study reveals the norms constructed in professional families that are imbued with violence using the concept suggested by Foucault. This study affirms Foucault in terms of rupture. In Javanese society, men becoming victims of violence is a rupture, because, in a patriarchal society, men are supposed to have power over women. Domestic violence is important to be dissected because discipline starts with socialization in the family. Normalization comes from religion, tradition, culture, and economy. Normalization in society is reinforced by discourse, regulations, the concept of a good family, ideal family, and serene family; it all relates to power. All individuals are 'imprisoned' by panoptic norms they adhere to. This is what Foucault calls 'the condemned body'.

Women becoming perpetrators of violence is also a rupture. Previous studies have shown that female perpetrators of violence receive worse stigma than male perpetrators (Rhatigan et al. 2011, Ismail & Sarson 2021). This study in professional families shows that female perpetrators of violence are not the only ones who get negative stigma, men who become their victims also get negative labels from the community. When experiencing violence, men suffer from triple oppressions: first, they become the victims; second, they are embarrassed because they get a negative stigma from the community for failing and not being able to lead their families; and third, when men become the victims, they 'get punished' because it is considered as 'abnormal' for men to become victims of violence. Men who become victims of violence often become the subject of gossip in a variety of social settings, from the work environment, family, to friendship. Furthermore, Men fear that a divorce will damage their good name and the reputation of their extended family. They are concerned that it may affect their careers since they are considered unable to take care of their households properly. Thus, keeping violence a secret and enduring the marriage is considered a rational choice. In this case, educated men who become victims of domestic violence, in addition to being distressed by patriarchy, also embrace a patriarchal discourse. Men still want to be seen as good leaders and heads of families in the eyes of the community.

## **Conclusion**

This study concludes that in professional families, there are various forms of violence experienced by men: verbal/psychological, physical, economic, and sexual violence. Various triggers for women to commit violence against men can be abstracted into the following sociological concepts: insecurity, jealousy, and inequality in socioeconomic status. The husbands' reactions to violence committed by their wives are in the form of latent resistance, manifest resistance, and alienation.

Men are distressed by patriarchy which places them in a superior position. Many roles must be played that require men to assume power over women. Men must always win and must not lose to women. Men as family leaders should not be seen as weak in front of women. Masculinity makes male victims

of violence experience triple oppression. When men become victims of violence, they are embarrassed by the negative stigma labeled to them. They are considered as 'abnormal' because society considers them to fail to carry out their role as the ruler in the family. Men become the object of gossip in various social settings, including work environment, friendship, and family. Masculinity compels men to choose silence, secrecy, and passivity in reacting to the violence they experience.

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