



Maypole
Women

Interviewing women with children involved in separation and divorce

Guidance for journalists

The majority of couples separate without major conflict. However, domestic abuse is a common cause of relationship breakdown. Separation can be a dangerous time for women and abuse can increase, or start where there was none before. Abuse can occur for years after the separation, and is most likely to occur if a woman has children with her ex partner.

High conflict is often an indication of domestic abuse, and conflict commonly becomes focused on child contact. Abuse is defined as the misuse of power and control – it can involve tactics such as intimidation, which causes fear and manipulates the mother's and/ or the children's thoughts and behaviours. Abuse can have a devastating effect on a woman's life, including damaging her connection to her children, see

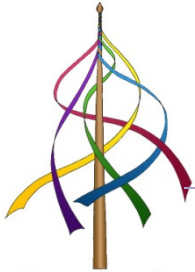
<http://www.maypole.org.uk/damage-to-the-mother-child-relationship.htm>.

The effects of abuse can often create the stories of great interest for the media. Yet much abuse is invisible, and women often do not name their experiences as 'abuse' or 'violence'.

Therefore, when interviewing women who have had particularly difficult experiences whilst, or after, ending a relationship, please be aware that they may have experienced domestic abuse, and could still be vulnerable.

There are risks for such women in talking to the media if their identities are revealed, because:

- speaking out may invite the possibility of a backlash. The most common means a father could do this is by interfering with financial support or child contact. If there is a history of high conflict or abuse in the relationship the risk is increased, as abusive men are typically retaliatory.
- the mother/ child relationship after parental separation is not completely secure, at least until the child reaches adulthood. The relationship, or contact, can be affected



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by domestic abuse and alienating tactics. Losing child contact can be particularly damaging, psychologically and financially, to parents who have acted as the child's primary care giver (and most women have, even if working full time).

- even when there is no conflict or abuse, talking openly to the press may inflame conflict. The very fact that a parent is putting their version of events to the nation may cause their ex to want to 'put the record straight' (as he sees it). It is conflict that is recognised as causing the greatest harm to children, not the parental separation itself, so there could be a risk that the children would suffer harm.
- anything said in public could be used by an ex partner as evidence of the mother's 'poor' character or parenting capacity, either to the child (to induce alienation) or to support a (further) custody contest.

Therefore, please be aware of the potential risks involved for some women in talking to the media. We would be grateful if you could offer all women the option of:

- non disclosure of their name, and identifying features changed
- a copy of a draft version to review and approve before publication

We would also be grateful if you could mention Maypole Women <http://www.maypole.org.uk/> in any relevant article, and consider making a donation <http://www.maypole.org.uk/donate.htm>.

Thank you.