

Japan's battered men suffer abuse in silence

As in many surveys, numbers and percentages are abundant. But for me, it was that little 3.4 at the bottom of page 21 that stood out more than any other: 3.4 percent of married men in Japan say that their spouses have forced them to engage in sexual relations against their will. And that is down from 4.3 percent reported three years ago. Improvement is apparently being made: Married men in Japan are essentially being raped less by their wives.

This survey, conducted by the Cabinet Office every three years, sampled 5,000 men and women across the nation in November and December of last year. About 6 percent of all marriages in Japan now involve a non-Japanese partner.

Most of the reported findings, which were released in April, are alarming: 32.9 percent of married women in Japan claim to be victims of spousal violence; 25.9 percent say they have been punched, kicked or shoved.

The assertions made by the other gender are nearly as troubling: 18.3 percent of married men in Japan are now claiming to be victims of spousal violence, with 13.3 percent of all married men in the sample claiming to be victims of violence that entailed punching, kicking or shoving.

These numbers are far higher than those often cited in the U.S., where one in four women is reported to have experienced domestic violence (DV) over a lifetime, and 85 percent of the victims of intimate partner violence are women. Intimate partner violence (IPV) includes violence from current or former spouses, boyfriends or girl-



The abused or the abuser?: The Gender Equality Bureau's emblem against violence is unlikely to reassure male victims of spousal abuse that the agency is looking out for their interests as well as those of battered women.

friends, including same-sex relationships. Domestic violence includes IPV in addition to violence from other family members, such as in-laws, siblings, parents or children.

In the Cabinet Office survey, 8.7 percent of married men subjected to physical, emotional or sexual violence indicated that it was so intense that they actually feared for their life; 13.4 percent of married women reported the same. In fact, 5.5 percent of married men apparently found the abuse so intolerable that they decided to end the relationship, which interestingly is nearly identical to the 5.6 percent of married women who did the same.

For those who stay in these abusive relationships, the question must be "Why?" Men reported staying mostly for the children. In fact, a greater percentage of male victims (65.0 percent) than female victims (57.3 percent) cited the children as their reason for staying. Men also indicated worries about keeping up appearances and concerns for their partner's needs far more than women when asked why they stayed.

Men more than women recognized DV as consisting of slapping, kicking or causing a bodily injury, whereas a greater percentage of women said DV also included behavior such as ignoring the partner for a long period of time, calling the partner a "good-for-nothing useless person" (*kaishō nashi*) or shouting in a loud voice.

The percentage of respondents who were unaware that a DV-related law exists — i.e., the Act on the Prevention of Spousal Violence and the Protection of Victims (2001) — has actually grown to 22.5 percent over the 19.3 percent recorded in 2005, with most of the uninformed being men between the ages of 20 and 39.

A tone that is fairly prevalent throughout the report, though, is an emphasis on the suffering by female victims over that of men. For example, even though the raw data shows that 76.1 percent of married men who had been victims of spousal violence over the past five years did not seek assistance or guidance in response to the abuse they were subjected to, the heading given to this section of the report emphasizes that help had not been sought by about 40 percent of women. While the assertion about women is certainly true, turning a blind eye to the apparent hidden shame of abuse being borne by a far higher percentage of male victims seems to indicate the leanings of the Gender Equality Bureau, which is tasked with producing this report for the Cabinet Office.

Moreover, nine pages of the 57-page report are dedicated to the 14.1 percent of mar-

ried women who claim to have been forced to engage in sexual relations against their will. Not one word is given to explaining the 3.4 percent of married men who claimed the same, or the 4.3 percent who claimed it three years ago.

The survey seems to indicate that the apparently passive men and women who comprise the stereotypical family in Japan may not be as docile as thought once the front door closes. Nearly 1 in 5 married men in Japan is now claiming to be a victim of spousal violence, up from 17.7 percent in 2008 and 17.4 percent in 2005. The percentage for married women making the same claim has actually decreased slightly since 2005, but remains 1 in 3.

Why would spousal violence against married men in Japan be steadily increasing? The peer-reviewed *European Journal of Scientific Research* tackled a similar question in 2010 in a research article titled "The Relationship between Jealousy and Aggression: A Review of Literatures Related to Wives' Aggression." The article mentions an oft-cited study by professors Richard Felson and Maureen Outlaw based on an analysis of data obtained through the National Violence Against Women survey conducted in 2000. The journal reports, "Individuals who are controlling of their partners are much more likely to also be physically assaultive, and this holds equally for both male and female perpetrators."

When asked whether abusive men or women in Japan could possibly be characterized as controlling of their households and partners, a representative of the Gender Equality Bureau declined to comment. The bureau representative answered some questions, but she said she was not able to respond to others, such as how the bureau would explain the progressive rise in spousal violence claims by men.

Moreover, spousal violence against men in Japan has interestingly been ignored by the mainstream English press. The *Daily Yomiuri* and *The Japan Times* (www.japantimes.co.jp/text/ed20120513a2.html) both reported the claim of spousal violence by 32.9 percent of married women. Neither mentioned the reported abuse of 1 in 5 married men. Both newspapers reported that 14.1 percent of married women had been forced to engage in sexual relations with their husband. Neither paper reported on the marital rape of 3.4 percent of men. Both newspapers reported that 41.4 percent of abused women suffered in silence. Neither reported the silent suffering by a much higher 76.1 percent of abused men.

Why? Why is spousal violence against men seemingly being ignored by the press and

the government bureau that conducts this survey? When I put this very question to the Gender Equality Bureau, I was told that even though men are included in the sample, the purpose of this research is to protect women from DV. Women.

And DV against women in Japan is obviously a problem, even though the latest data in this survey clearly shows that claims by women are trending slightly downward, and claims by men are trending upward.

Several of the questions I had for the Gender Equality Bureau concerned the composition of their organization: How many men and women work there? How many men and women were involved in the writing of this survey analysis?

Even though corporations often publish data on employee demographics, I was surprisingly told that the government bureau tasked with ensuring gender equality was unable to specify the gender makeup of its own organization or those who crafted this survey analysis.

With the bureau apparently giving no attention to its own data indicating an increase in the spousal abuse of the nation's men — men who mostly classify abuse as physical assaults — one must wonder how the bureau would respond if more men subjected to nonphysical forms of abuse began to make claims, thus resulting in a rapid surge in the overall percentage of men reporting abuse. Would the bureau continue to ignore the men, leaving so many to suffer in silence as they do now? Or would it begin what may be a much needed campaign to help women in Japan better recognize, control and eliminate their own abusive behavior?

If the claims in this data can be trusted, Japan clearly has a developing DV epidemic on its hands. And it's not rising because of any increase in violence against women. Rather, it's the women who are increasingly charging into battle against the nation's men.

The word "married" in this article refers to men and women who are or have been legally married or in common-law unions. Guidance for victims of spousal abuse is provided in Japanese, English, Spanish, Thai, Tagalog, Korean, Chinese, Portuguese and Russian at www.gender.go.jp/e-vaw/siensya/08.html#forigner1. Information in English on phone numbers for spousal violence centers across Japan can also be found on this website. Send comments on this issue to community@japantimes.co.jp