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## Battered Men: Hidden Lives

10pm Monday 23 October 2006



Every minute of every day, someone is a victim of domestic violence. It might surprise you to hear that 22% of the victims are male, although the British Crime Survey reckons the true figure could be a lot higher, seeing as many men are too ashamed to report their abuse. Psychotherapist and counsellor Dr. Sheri Jacobson says many men are suffering in silence because they "have the emotional pain of being attacked – dejected, belittled, devalued – and the social stigma attached to being a male victim".

The McBride family remember Peter as an outgoing and happy-go-lucky person when he met Sonia at the age of 18. 22-year-old Sonia seemed to be a nice enough girl, but when the couple moved into the family home they started to see some cracks. Peter seemed afraid to speak his mind in front of Sonia, who definitely wore the trousers in the relationship. On Christmas Day 1994, the family saw the first sign of Sonia's aggressive behaviour when she thumped Peter for falling asleep after dinner. They didn't give it too much thought, and it wasn't until the couple moved out that Sonia's domineering behaviour got really serious. Peter stopped going out. He hardly saw his friends and family, and when he did, Sonia would ring

constantly, checking up on where he was and what he was doing. "Isolation is a psychological form of abuse and it sets the scene for physical violence" says Dr. Jacobson. By removing Peter's self-esteem and external support systems, Sonia made sure Peter felt he couldn't leave her or live without her. She had him on a ball and chain; when they fought, Peter would leave, but Sonia would apologise and they would get back together. No one knew what was going on because Peter constructed a web of deceit to cover up for the escalating violence Sonia was inflicting on him. When she smashed up his ear with a glass ashtray, he told his family that he had walked into a scaffolding pole. If anyone confronted Peter about his injuries, he would brush them off, saying "I'll deal with it." His mother says sadly, "I honestly believe that he would stand there and take a hiding from her rather than walk away because he absolutely adored her". According to a 2001 survey, less than 8% of male victims retaliated, even if their partners asked to be hit back. As one victim says, "As a man, you can't afford to hit back because if the police see any marks they will assume the man is in the wrong. On 7th July 2002, Peter and Sonia had their last horrific argument, which resulted in Sonia stabbing Peter through the heart. He was left brain-dead and on a life support machine for six days, until his family made the heart-wrenching decision to switch off his machine. Even with his dying words, Peter defended Sonia, covering up for her violence with his last breath, telling the 999 operator that he fell onto a knife. Of course, Sonia stuck to this story, but a pathologist report proved that Sonia stabbed Peter. She was eventually diagnosed with borderline personality disorder and sentenced to three and a half years in prison for 'manslaughter on the grounds of diminished responsibility.' She was released after 21 months. Not all stories end as bleakly as Peter's. After a dark spell of domestic violence, Matt Hardwick from Leicester asked his family for help before going to the police, who told him he needed evidence. Every time his partner attacked him, he recorded the incidents on his mobile phone, helping him to realise that he was not the one in the wrong. He moved away from his partner and won custody of their little girl. "It's a case of facing up to it, realising it's not your fault...there is a way out," Matt says. This documentary also speaks to women who have been abusers in the past, looking at ways in which both partners can get out of the vicious circle they are embroiled in.