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Mental Health Experts Vital in the Fight Against Domestic Violence

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Psychologists and psychotherapists are playing an increasingly important role in preventing violence against women, as growing numbers of men are presenting to mental health professionals for anger issues.

Anger – described as the action of showing violent or self-destructive behaviour or having a pathologically aggressive nature – is one of the least well-managed mental health conditions among men, according to clinical psychologist Dr John Kearny, who cites it as one of the main perceived causes for 64 per cent of violence against women.



“Anger gives us the energy to deal with difficult, sometimes threatening situations, so it’s important to be able to feel anger occasionally,” Dr Kearney said.

“However, when it occurs frequently and with too much intensity – or is increasingly linked to aggression – it becomes a destructive emotion that can be classified as a disorder.”



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Dr Kearney said he has seen an increase in the number of people presenting for extreme anger, which is often driven by personal stressors, such as death of a family member or close relative, job instability, relationship problems, and school or work problems.

When coupled with a serious mental illness, such as alcohol dependence, these stressors can lead anger to escalate rapidly, often resulting in incidents of violence against an intimate partner or other forms of family violence.

Counselling Psychotherapist Dr Karen Philip said she too had identified an increase in men presenting with anger issues, wanting to find strategies to lower their anger and aggression.

“While this is positive it is often attached to their partner, workplace or children demanding they seek



“While anger is present in each of us, it becomes a problem when it escalates instantly, and the individual is unable to control their emotions.

“This can be in the form of verbal abuse, physical violence, intimidation or bullying of another.”

Dr Phillip says while mental health professionals had also seen an escalation of violence in women, it remains primarily a male issue as they are stronger, louder and more violent and intimidating.

“The role of the male is changing as women no longer need or rely on a man and can do most jobs once reserved for a male.

“This can frustrate a man escalating his dominance in anger outbursts which is no longer acceptable within the family or community.”

In addition to triggering factors in adulthood, Dr Phillip says anger-based behaviours are often learned from childhood and environment in which the individual has been raised.

“This becomes the persons normal response when something does not go as they want or expect.

“It can also point to a man feeling fear, hence they increase anger and aggression, so they are not seen as soft, they are viewed in control or the Alpha male.”

While numbers of men seeking help are increasing, Dr Phillip says it’s crucial for the therapist to develop a positive rapport with the client, to encourage them to open up more.

“There is no judgement in the counselling room, only listening, understanding and support.

“Aiding the individual to understand the reason they react as they do is extremely beneficial toward reclamation control.”

Both mental health professionals and the public are acutely aware of the prevalence of escalating societal violence, which has both positive and negative repercussions.

“We are inundated with stories and visual news on anger, violence and poor behaviour.

“We have angry and aggressive video games and this is considered part of the issue, aggressive type behaviour is normal to win these games.

“It is becoming our normal.

“But the fact we are now discussing this issue openly instead of being kept secret behind closed doors is positive.

“Women are also understanding this behaviour is unacceptable and are no longer tolerating the wrath of their male partner.”

Given the link between anger and domestic violence, the role mental health professionals play in preventing and decreasing DV has never been more important.

“Psychologists and counsellors are crucial to lower anger and aggression within our community.

“Those with the right training can work very proactively and positively with those men wanting to remove their anger and aggressive behavioural displays.

“This then is modelled to the children who can grow and develop into more balanced individuals without learning that violence and aggression is a normal part of living, used to make a point or get what we want.”



professionals must identify the source of the anger as soon as possible.

“Psychologists and counsellors work with the patient who wants to change, we cannot make a person do anything they do not want to do.

“If they desire to adjust their anger and regain control of self, there are many strategies they can learn.

“Once the reason for this escalation is understood and defined as simply having an aggressive tantrum because they can not get their own way, we work toward strategies to release the anger when situations occur.”

As violence against women continues to rise to epidemic levels, encouraging men to seek the help of mental health therapists is vital, and experts need to be on red alert for signs of potential violence.

“Aggression and violence is increasing in both genders.

“Steps need to be taken immediately to work with kids, families and individuals to find different and better ways to manage emotional escalation and teach methods to accept, respect and remain more composed.”

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