

I am Robert S Wells, I'm 51 years old and I live in Fleet, Hampshire.

I joined the Army at 18 and served almost 13 years in The Royal Military Police. I very quickly decided to specialise and joined the Mounted Branch of the Military Police in 1987. During this time, I became responsible for the rider training of Police Officers and new Police horses.

After leaving the Army in 1998, I spent many years running my own security business, working as a Close Protection Officer in the UK and briefly overseas, helping to protect high net worth individuals, visiting heads of state and foreign government ministers. I have worked in many challenging environments that include working directly with clients and security teams from China, Iraqi Kurdistan, India, Russia, America, Israel, Morocco, Germany, Switzerland and members of the United Arab Emirates. I have also worked in Scotland's version of Broadmoor. This is a maximum-security facility for 140 male patients that have secure care needs.

Hopefully this paints a picture of a person who is strong of mind and character. I'm no shrinking violet and, at the time, would never have considered myself to be the 'type of person' to become a victim to domestic abuse. Of course, I now know that there is no such thing as a 'typical victim.' We are all at risk!

I met my partner (Let's call her Sarah, not her real name) through a close friend about 12 years ago. As Sarah and I got to know each other we eventually agreed to go out on a date. I knew that Sarah was a bit of a party animal but that was one of the things that attracted me. She was beautiful, funny and dangerous! Looking back, I was a fool, because I sensed trouble but ignored it.

Over the coming weeks, I discovered that Sarah was married but separated and had sent her young son to live with his Father's Grandparents in Scotland. This was because she had found herself unable to look after him, due to a drink and drugs issue, which had sent her into a destructive spiral.

All the red lights were there but I also discovered something horrific from her childhood. It's not my place to go into details here, but it was enough for me to want to stand beside her, to love her and to try to show her that not all of the men in her life would use and abuse her. I saw myself as a knight in shining armour, which I guess is a little arrogant but I fell for her and wanted to help her.

I didn't realise it at the time but over the coming months, I was carefully manipulated into a position of isolation, especially as I have no real family in the U.K

Once isolated, things become volatile and a pattern emerged when she was drinking. She would be happy and playful for a while, then she would become overtly sexual, even with other people in the house. After that, her mood would dip and she would become spiteful and unpleasant, then the fists would come out.

But it was too late for me. I was already isolated and fully committed, having given up my long-term home and my job after she announced that she wanted to move away, to be closer to her family and start a fresh. I moved with her, giving up my rented home of 8 years and everything in it.

Within days of moving to our new home, she attacked me, punching me so hard in the face, that she broke her hand. I've also been woken up at night by a flurry of punches to the face and I've been threatened with a knife.

On one occasion in our new home, the neighbours called the Police after hearing a commotion. It was this particular Police Force's policy, in domestic abuse situations, to remove one person from the property to prevent further escalation. That seems like a good idea, doesn't it? Well, actually, no!

If you know anything about domestic abuse, you'll know that it's about power and control and a part of that, was to not put me on the rent agreement. If you rock the boat, you're out. So, when the Police asked whose home it was, I knew what was coming. The Police Officers said that I had to leave and offered to drop me at a local hotel. Unfortunately, my finances were already being controlled by my partner, so when I stated that I couldn't afford a hotel (politely and calmly) both of these huge officers jumped on me, handcuffed me and dragged me from the house. I was then thrown into Police cells until lunchtime the following day.

In effect, these Police officers had become a tool of my abuser. I was the victim, yet here I was being aggressively arrested and dragged from my home, to spend a night in Police cells. Meanwhile, my attacker sat comfortably at home, no doubt in smug satisfaction that I had been 'taught a lesson.' On my return home the next day, I was mocked and belittled.

My solicitor had made some pretty strong protestations to the Police and on this occasion and I received a visit from the Chief Constable, (while my partner was out) who apologised in person for my treatment. The damage was done and nothing he said helped to calm the burning injustice that I felt. There were many other incidents after this but I just kept my head down and made excuses for her. Each time it happened, I thought about her past and told myself that one, day, she would realise that I wasn't the enemy.

It wasn't long before Sarah announced a move to Scotland. Sarah's parents got together and begged me not to go. 'She will destroy you' they said. I responded by saying that if I didn't stand by her, who would.

Sarah promised that It would all be better in Scotland. 'I can get my son back and be happy again,' she said. We moved to Scotland. Again, I wasn't allowed to be on the rent agreement. I got a job, paid the bills and the abuse got worse. I was now in a low paid job. I had no car, lived in a small village, miles from anywhere and no family in the U.K. to turn to. My bank card was permanently taken from me and I had to ask for money if I wanted it.

I can hear you saying, 'Why would you agree to that?'

Originally Sarah asked to keep hold of my bank card because she was at home all day and said that she could get the shopping while I was at work. It seemed like a sensible idea so I handed it over. Then, when I asked for it back, it would be a drama, she would kick off and make life difficult, so I stopped asking. If I needed money, I had to ask for it. I felt that Sarah could pick up the phone to the Police and say anything at any time, then it would be me in the cells again. Or I could get a punch in the mouth!

Eventually Sarah became pregnant. At the time, I wasn't even sure the baby was mine but I stood by her.

Then it happened, the abuse, the violence, everything – Stopped. Just like that. And for almost a year, our relationship was perfect. I thought that the tide had turned.

Our beautiful daughter was born (I secretly did a DNA test, confirming that she was mine) But Sarah refused to put me on the birth certificate. On top of that, she didn't give our daughter her name, but her maiden name.

Then, a couple of months later, I was attacked again.

This time things were hugely different. I was holding our daughter, who at the time was choking on medication she had been given. When your kid is choking, it's one of the most frightening things that you can deal with. My daughter was struggling to breath and I was frantically trying to clear her airway, when I was punched hard in the face from the side.

I staggered to one side, pulling her close to me. I instinctively covered our daughter with my body as the blows rained down. I was screaming at Sarah to stop, which she eventually did but she continued to scream abuse at me. Her reason – The way I had asked her to hand over our daughter so I could administer first aid. Luckily, our daughter was ok. Her airway cleared during the struggle and she wasn't hurt by the attack. She was also too young to remember the incident.

I didn't know it at the time, but this was the turning point. The shock of being attacked again, whilst holding our baby, tipped me over the edge and I had a breakdown. I collapsed at work in front of my boss and ended up telling my occupational health department everything.

Because a child was involved, the staff in occupational health, were duty bound to inform social services. The police had always treated me as the perpetrator and my partner as the victim but when I was called in to be interviewed by social services, it was the first time in about three years, that I received positive help. I sat in front of this poor lady and sobbed like a child as I told my story. The lady that interviewed me, (I wish I knew her name) listened to my story and took immediate action. I was terrified that we would lose our baby to the system but I was equally terrified of what Sarah would do when she found out that I had told someone about the attacks.

Sarah was interviewed and eventually admitted the attack. Whilst she was angry at me and remained verbally abusive, she backed off a little.

After I was called back in by social services, I was told that Sarah had admitted the attack but that she claimed she had been provoked. The lady at social services said that there were two kinds of abuser.

The ones who admitted that they had an issue and wanted to work to change their behaviour.

And the ones that denied that they had an issue and blamed everything on the victim.

I was told that my partner was the latter. 'Go home, pack a bag and leave.' I was told. 'But you won't, I can see it in your face and hear it in your words' she said. 'On average, it takes 30 serious assaults before people start to try to leave' she said. (I believe this number has now changed.)

I don't recall how long it was before I did leave but I eventually got myself a flat in the village and moved out. I kept my job, had my daughter at weekends and really started to get my life back together, or so I thought. Unfortunately, things were about to get a lot worse!

One weekend Sarah asked if she could come around to see me, have a drink and talk things over. Like a fool, I agreed. It turned out that her mother, who had moved from England to be close to Sarah, had banned her from drinking at home. She pulled out a large bottle of vodka and did cocaine on my living room table. I protested but was told to 'stop being so fucking boring.' Her behaviour followed its usual pattern and I could see things were going to turn nasty, so I asked her to leave. I had our daughter for the weekend and she was asleep in her cot.

When I asked Sarah to leave, she exploded and attacked me violently. She was screaming at me and punching me. She threw my laptop across the room and started stamping on it. She screamed that she was going to take our daughter, so I tried to block her by standing in front of the bedroom door. She continued to attack me, so I dialled 999 and begged the police to get there asap. She grabbed the phone, hung up and beat me about the face with it.

She got into our daughters' room and I tried to restrain her by grabbing her wrists to protect my daughter and myself and to try to drag her from the bedroom. I was terrified on several levels. Terrified she was going to accidentally hurt our baby as she was so drunk and terrified, I would be arrested again despite doing nothing. I got the phone again and dialled 999. I was screaming for help down the phone. Then I decided to run. I ran out of the flat, locked her in with our baby so that she could not take her and called the police again.

When they arrived, we were both arrested and taken to the police station, along with our daughter. Sarah refused to say anything and was released with our daughter. A Police officer said to me, 'Your partner has been very clever and said nothing, so we've had to release her.' 'But because you've admitted grabbing her by the wrists and pulling her and because we have to act in these situations, you are going to be charged with assault.'

Despite being violently attacked in my own home, making a number of 999 calls begging for help and fleeing my own flat with my face battered. I was still being labelled the perpetrator, while my abuser walked free, with our daughter.

I really can't put into words how I felt at that moment. Ten years on, as I write this, I'm shaking again and have a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach.

I was held overnight, taken to court, handcuffed, in a prison van and bailed for 5 months with a condition that I stayed away from Sarah and my baby. During those five months, I was driven to the point of suicide. I just didn't see a way out. I was utterly terrified of ending up in prison and never seeing my daughter again. I just didn't see any point in carrying on.

One evening, I could not stop crying, I was a completely broken man. I drank heavily, wrote goodbye letters to my daughters and placed a note on my front door warning anyone that was trying to get in. I placed a rope around the rafters through the loft hatch, climbed onto a stool and put the rope around my neck.

I stood on that stool in the dark, crying like a baby. At one point I rocked the stool. This was it. But then I started to think about my eldest daughter from my first marriage, she thought people who killed themselves were selfish. I didn't agree with her attitudes on suicide but it made me consider how she would think of me for the rest of her life and it was enough to stop me.

This was another turning point. I thought that I could turn up to court in five months, a completely broken man. Or I could turn up with my head held high. So, I went out, brought myself a weight lifting kit and concentrated my efforts and my mind into getting fit. I trained three hours a day after work, six days a week for five months. Sure, I still had some terrible days where I really felt that I could not cope but I came through it.

After 5 months of torture, waiting and wondering what was going to happen to me, the case was dropped on the day of my court appearance. The verdict, no case to answer! Just like that, it was over. I had almost killed myself for a paper exercise by Police Scotland!

I left Scotland shortly after the case was dropped. I knew that I had to get as far away as possible. I turned to my eldest brother who lived in Canada. I borrowed £1000 and I left Scotland in a hire car with four small boxes of possessions. It was a truly heart-breaking day as I didn't know if I would ever see my daughter again.

I never made an official complaint because I didn't feel that there was any point. As a man, the police and authorities don't look at you as a victim. The stereotype of the man as the perpetrator and the woman a victim is still the view, even when the evidence is staring the Police and authorities in the face. I also knew that if I made an official complaint, I would never be allowed to see my daughter again. I was not named on the birth certificate and we were not married, so I had no parental rights at all.

So, ten years on, it's only been in the last few months that I've really been able to open up and start to discuss my experiences with people other than those closest to me. As an advocate, I now share my experience in the hope of helping others.

My most recent domestic abuse talks have been to representatives from:

The Royal Military Police
The Royal Air Force Police
The Royal Navy Police
The Royal Marines.
The Army Welfare Service
SSAFA (The Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association)
The Hampton Trust
Aldershot Garrison Headquarters
Aurora New Dawn
Hampshire Constabulary
Croydon Council

I've also given two interviews on domestic abuse against men, on BFBS Forces radio and had articles published in newspapers and magazines.

As a former Royal Military Policeman and Protection Officer, I never believed that I could become the victim of domestic abuse. However, I've since learned, through my own experiences, that ANYONE can become a victim of this terrible crime.

When talking to Police Forces and frontline agencies, I outline my own experiences of dealing with those agencies as I battled to get help. I talk about how hard it was to get the support I needed because of victim and perpetrator stereotypes.

I am now the Director of Domestic Abuse Business Support Ltd (DABS), supporting businesses and their employees from the very real threat of domestic abuse in the workplace.

Lastly, I want to say this.

Things have changed over the last ten years and the tide is finally turning, with men now being recognised as victims of domestic abuse. If you are suffering from domestic abuse, please reach out to someone, the support is there for you and the Police will listen.

I'm very thankful that I didn't turn that chair over, because ten years on, I'm in an amazing relationship with my fabulous partner and I get to see both of my girls growing up. My life is now full of laughter and adventure and I've never been happier. Life is never easy but it is definitely worth living.

I now have a good working relationship with Sarah, who, along with her Mother and Sister, who both moved to Scotland to support Sarah, do a great job of raising my daughter. I pay regular maintenance and see my daughter during the school holidays.

If you are in an abusive relationship, NEVER EVER GIVE UP!

You can find out more about domestic abuse in the workplace at www.d-a-b-s.co.uk