

Ladies who pack a helluva punch

By MARK SCHREIBER

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"I sense this problem had been around previously, but over the past two or three years, the number of men who admit it's happened to them has been growing," remarks marriage counselor Atsuko Okano. "It's no longer taboo to discuss it in the open."

What, asks Yomiuri Weekly, is this dark, dirty secret that men have been confiding to Okano?



Some wives, it seems, batter their husbands.

The problem is by no means rare. A government survey of 2,888 adults conducted in 2005 found that 13.8 percent of males responded that they had been on the receiving end of violence at the hands (or feet) of their partner. For women, the figure was roughly double (26.7 percent).

Mitsuko, who's in her late 30s, admits clobbering men. The first recipient of her violent ways was her ex-hubby, who probably deserved it. While she worked to support the family, he stayed home and played video games instead of helping with housework or looking after their child. Then one day she snapped, and lashed out at him with a flurry of fists and feet.

Since then, Mitsuko's been unable to wean herself of the habit. For her, violence has become a means of communication.



"Sometimes I scare myself," she admits.

"Things got so bad, I didn't want to go home at night.



But I just couldn't bring myself to discard this

woman who'd abused me," was how Nobuo, a 40-year old freelance writer puts it. In addition to her tantrums and suicide threats, she had scratched his face and punched him, but he persevered for seven years before finally divorcing her.

According to Miya Erino, whose book "Abarereru-kei onna-tachi (violent women)" was released last month by Kodansha, women have also been known to attack other women at the workplace. In one case study, she introduces a bank where a distinct employee hierarchy existed, consisting of regular bank staff; workers from a firm that outsourced former workers from the bank; and staff from a regular outsourcing agency.

During an office party, one of the bank's regulars, a single career woman, snapped and lashed out at an outsourced former bank worker. The latter, now married and with a child, resented the regular's higher status and implied she was suffering from "hysteria" due to her status as a *make-inu* ("loser dog" -- a term applied to single women in their 30s). Infuriated, the regular lashed out.

"It was never my intention to stay at this job," she says in way of justification. "If anything, the job kept me from finding a husband."

Counselor Okano believes these increasing acts of violence by women reflect changes in Japanese society, particularly the growing awareness toward male-female equality. Irrespective of age, however, all too often a perception persists for a man that his role is to hold down a salaried job while the woman remains at home. Women see things differently. And resentment festers.

"Instead of avoiding household chores, at first a husband should get involved little by little," Okano advises. "And he should learn to say 'Thank you' more often to his wife."

And what can wives do to narrow the gender gap?

"Rather than just stewing and letting the anger build up over how unfair things seem, she should work at improving ways to communicate her feelings," Okano suggests.

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