

There's a woman in our village walking about with two black eyes. We all know her husband gave them to her and we all, like she does, pretend that we don't notice them. She seems a nice enough woman, keeps herself to herself, but always says hello. I've heard she drops in on an elderly neighbour and helps with shopping. Her kids are always well turned out and are getting on fine at school. No-one ever mentions her injuries – perhaps like me they think they don't know her well enough or that it is none of our business. If I get the chance I ask her if she is all right, with what I hope is meaningful expression in my eyes, but she says 'yes' defensively and then turns away, both of us embarrassed by the encounter.

What is it that stops us from helping this woman, who so obviously is not able to help herself? She doesn't have to report him to the police for them to investigate; they can see for themselves what has happened. If there is enough evidence, she doesn't even need to go to court. And yet, the local police and the rest of us just turn a blind eye to what is going on under our very noses.

My excuse for doing nothing? Fear. Fear of not being right, fear of what other people will think about me interfering. That little voice inside my head that tells me to look the other way, that it's not my problem.

The police? I suspect they are frightened too. Frightened we will complain about them wasting time, if he doesn't get convicted in court. Frightened that they will make it worse for the women, that by ignoring it, she is only getting black eyes, but angering him might make him do something even worse.

Family? Maybe her family think it's OK; maybe her father hits her mum. That might explain why she thinks she has to put up with it. Maybe his family choose

to pretend it's not happening. Maybe they think she has done something to deserve it.

It's her problem, if she doesn't like it she can get out. Take her children away from their school and friends. Go where? Inverness, and live in a hostel with a dozen other families? Or would he find her there and come to take her back?

Maybe she should go to Glasgow and try and start a life there with no money and no job. Maybe she thinks the children are better off where they are.

But you know what? It's not just her problem, it's my problem too. Maybe not right now, but one day he or one of his kind will hurt me or someone I love. The type of men that hit their wives, hit others as well. He might thump your son in the pub (yes, of course he drinks) or rape your sister in her home. And he'll get away with it. The longer you and I turn a blind eye to scum like him, the more confident he'll get, the better his cover stories will be, and when finally someone is brave enough to stand up to him, and lucky enough to get the police willing to take him on, he will hoodwink the courts and walk free to start again.

Meanwhile his victim and their family will be left to pick up the pieces and try to get on with their lives.

His children will grow up thinking that it's OK to hit people weaker than you are, and that if you are the weak one, and someone hits you, then you'll just have to put up with it. And so the cycle continues.

I've always thought violence was a city problem, but look around you. We all know someone who has suffered or is suffering now. We are the only ones who can stop it. We need to stand up to these bullies and let them know that their behaviour is not acceptable, that their victims have someone they can turn to,

prepared to help them and keep our communities safe. And not just for the sake of this women, but for the sake of all of us and for our children.

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