



Domestic Abuse Act 2021 Committee

Uncorrected oral evidence: Domestic Abuse Act post-legislative scrutiny

Thursday 23 April 2026

11.45 am

Watch the meeting

Members present: Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws (The Chair); Baroness Gerada; Baroness Gohir; Baroness Neate; Lord Polak; Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede; Baroness Rafferty; Lord Russell of Liverpool; Baroness Sugg.

Evidence Session No. 10

Heard in Public

Questions 85 – 94

Witnesses

I: Angie Airlie, CEO, Stay Safe East; Bridget Symonds, Director of Services, Galop; Mark Brooks OBE, Chair, The ManKind Initiative; Richard Robinson, CEO, Hourglass.

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Examination of witnesses

Angie Airlie, Bridget Symonds, Mark Brooks and Richard Robinson.

Q85 The Chair: Welcome back to the second panel of this session reviewing the Domestic Abuse Act introduced in 2021. The purpose of this Select Committee's work is to eventually report on the impact of that legislation, whether it is effective or if there are gaps or failings, and you might be able to assist us in examining that.

Let me introduce this exceptional panel. Angie Airlie is the chief executive from Stay Safe East. Welcome, Angie. It is a user-led organisation run by disabled people providing specialist advocacy and support for disabled survivors of domestic and sexual violence, hate crime, and different forms of abuse. It often shocks people to find that the disabled community are subjected to domestic abuse, so it is very important that we hear the voice of that community in taking this evidence. Thank you for being here.

Bridget Symonds has been the director of services at Galop since June 2024, and prior to that she was the CEO of Opening Doors, which is dedicated to supporting older LGBT+ people. She has worked as head of women's centres, safeguarding women in prison, and oversaw services for women affected by the criminal justice system generally. It is great to have you here, given the wealth of your experience. Thank you for coming, Bridget.

We also have Mark Brooks, who has over 25 years of senior and national-level experience in communications, marketing, public policy, and public affairs. He has been the chair of ManKind Initiative since 2011, so has quite significant experience. He is currently the director of policy and communications at the new independent think tank, the Centre for Policy Research on Men and Boys. It is an increasingly covered issue of concern. You have a catalogue of experience beyond your formal role so thank you for being here and speaking for the Mankind Initiative, Mark.

Richard Robinson is the chief executive of Hourglass, which was formerly known as Action on Elder Abuse. It is a UK-wide charity dedicated to ending the abuse, harm, and exploitation of older people. You took up that post in 2019, is that right?

Richard Robinson: That is right.

The Chair: It followed a personal family crisis. You have been involved in other charitable work in the sector, and you are here to talk about the ways in which abuse can be experienced from children towards adults, as well as other forms of domestic elder abuse; we are looking at it within the domestic domain.

Let me start off with a general question, but can you be quite short in the explanation of what you do? When the Act came in, what were your hopes and expectations for the particular group of people you are talking about? How has the law impacted that community and has it lived up to

expectations? If not, why and in what way? Let me start and go along the line. Bridget, could you give us your experience?

Bridget Symonds: Our hope for the Domestic Abuse Act was that it would be an inclusive piece of legislation and cover LGBT+ people's experiences of violence and abuse. We feel that has happened. There is an expansive definition that covers civil partnerships and same-sex relationships. The guidance has a whole section on sexual and gender identity. The expansive type of abuse in the definition has been very valuable to the IDVAs—the independent domestic violence advocates—who are working with our community, because there are many types of abuse that do not fit into the heterosexual cisgender lens through which a lot of domestic abuse is seen. For example, somebody may be abused by having medication withheld from them if they are a trans person, or they have a fear of being outed as a trans person—or their sexual identity—to an employer or their community. The more expansive definition allows for those types of abuses to fit within coercive control. The wider context for abuse is there.

The Chair: There are real pluses here.

Bridget Symonds: There are pluses.

The Chair: One of our Members in the House of Lords spoke of being someone who had experience within a gay relationship of domestic abuse. It is important for people to know that power relations and imperfect relations can exist in any community and between any people involved in intimate relations.

That was a good thing, but on the negative side?

Bridget Symonds: The negative side for us is that all services—other charities and statutory services—still really struggle to identify abuse in LGBT+ relationships. If you take the example of two gay men, the perpetrator is often decided to be the wrong person. There is a lack of understanding as to how two men might be in an abusive relationship because we are so conditioned by the heterosexual/cisgender lens through which we see domestic abuse. That is very difficult and can mean that LGBT people go to services that are generic and have a bad experience so often do not seek help again. It is very hard for us to know what the actual levels of domestic abuse are in LGBT relationships because many people are not even coming forward. They are not able to. We know from the crime survey for the year ending March 2025 that LGBT people experience higher rates of domestic abuse. We are just not necessarily able to see it in the work we are doing because many people do not come forward.

The Chair: Is the data not being collected?

Bridget Symonds: No, there is a lack of understanding and a lack of ability to identify certain things as abuse. A really prevalent issue for our community is so-called conversion practices, which often interact and

intersect with domestic abuse. It is a really specific experience for LGBT+ people, and a generic service is never going to pick it up and may dismiss it by thinking that it is not a big deal at all. It is that wider understanding for us that LGBT people's experiences are very different, and there is a requirement for "by and for" expert knowledge in order that these people can bring their experience to the fore and for that risk to then be identified correctly. That is the issue here. Risk is often overlooked because people do not understand the risky nature of the behaviour being discussed.

Q86 The Chair: Richard, you are dealing with elder abuse. How does it come to the attention of the authorities? Does it rarely come to the attention of the authorities? How is it unearthed?

Richard Robinson: Most people refer themselves to us via partnerships we have across the UK or through our 24/7 helpline. We have referral partnerships across the UK and we deal with older people, their families, and other professionals such as the police and social workers. There are all kinds of ways in really.

The Chair: Neighbours, presumably.

Richard Robinson: Neighbours or volunteers, anybody concerned. Our numbers have grown exponentially even since I have been in post, from 2018-19. That is one way the Act has been positive. The fact that the definition of domestic abuse is broad enough is also a huge positive.

The Chair: Are you disappointed about anything in the Act? Do you feel you had great hopes that have somehow not quite been delivered yet?

Richard Robinson: The Act itself is broad enough to encompass issues that face older people who experience abuse from family members—coercive controlling behaviour. Where it has come up short is the fact that older people are not dealt with on a level playing field in practice, similar to some points made by my colleague here. During the process, we supported proposals strengthening the recognition of the types of abuse within a caring and dependency framework. However, while the Act was in passage they were not taken forward. There is a key gap within the current definition parameters of the Act meaning that abuse linked to care, dependency, and support is less clearly articulated within it. That is a huge issue for us but the overarching issue is that there are 2.7 million people affected by the abuse of older people—60-plus—which is one in five older people, and we have barely scratched the surface. We are very rarely recognised within the VAWG sector. It appears that the voices of older people simply are not heard, and that is a daily fight for us as the only charity focused on this area.

Q87 The Chair: Angie, you are dealing with disability and I imagine it reflects some things we have already heard. It is an unheard section of our community.

Angie Airlie: Yes. As you alluded to in your preamble, Baroness Kennedy, we know that disabled people are experiencing domestic abuse

at a much higher level than the general population: at least two times more than those without disabilities.

The Chair: It is shocking.

Angie Airlie: Our big hope from the Act was that it would transform the accommodation options for disabled victim-survivors attempting to leave abusive relationships or to end abuse. Unfortunately, that has not happened. Still less than 1% of refuge spaces are fully accessible to disabled victim-survivors according to Women's Aid data. We are finding that clients we support are being forced to accept inappropriate temporary accommodation. To give you a couple of examples, we supported somebody recently who required specialist toileting equipment who was placed in shared accommodation where she had to share a bathroom. Each time she needed to use the bathroom, she had to port the toileting equipment into it. Clearly, it was highly unsuitable. Another woman was denied a refuge place because she needed hospital transport, which is usually provided by male drivers. Of course, refuges rightly have prohibitions against men coming to refuges. She ended up in temporary accommodation but could not even open the doors because they were too heavy and she was using crutches. For the same reason, she could not cook for herself.

Unfortunately, victim-survivors are being let down in the way the Act is being implemented. There are two main issues. Domestic abuse needs assessments, which are a requirement under the Act, are not translating into reality. To give you a very brief example, I reviewed a needs assessment by a county that I will not name but it mentioned disability 70 times. I then looked on Routes to Support, which is the national database for refuge places, and the county's refuge provision did not include one place that was accessible for disabled victim-survivors—so zero provision.

First, the needs assessment process does not necessarily have teeth; it does not always translate into reality. Secondly, there is no associated capital funding in most instances so we are reliant on providers to come up with the buildings to meet the contracts that the local authorities are commissioning. You might, for example, have a local authority that commissions 50 bed spaces. It may ask for five of them to be accessible but it is reliant on having the property to meet that need. That is one of the areas where the Bill is falling down. We would hope to see schemes that marry up capital and revenue funding to remedy that. A good example of that is—

Q88 **The Chair:** You can make recommendations but they will come later in this discussion. You have flagged up things that are a real concern. Mark, perhaps you can help us with regard to your area of interest.

Mark Brooks: When I am talking about men, I am talking about men in all their shapes, sizes, and guises, which obviously includes the men my colleagues to the right represent.

The Chair: Older men, gay men, disabled persons and so on who might be within the categories we are talking about. You are looking at the positives and negatives of the legislation.

Mark Brooks: We wanted to make sure that all victims were equally recognised so that we would see more men coming forward to services, given that the latest ONS figures show that 1.5 million men are victims of domestic abuse every year. It affects one in five men in their lifetime. What we are seeing is that when it comes to the community-based services, there are very few specialist services for men, very few specialist IDVAs for men, and that only one in 20 people who go to a community-led service—the main service commissioned by local authorities—is actually male. With the legislation, we had hoped that we would see more men come forward. The good bit about the legislation is that for the first time it hard-coded in law, with the underlying statutory guidance, what domestic abuse is and how it can be applied. Before then it was not always clear to statutory bodies, charities, or the public what was meant.

The other area that really undermines the application of the Domestic Abuse Act when it comes to men is a bigger issue. If you are a male victim of domestic abuse, you are officially classed by successive Governments as a victim of violence against a woman. Male victims of domestic abuse, including the related crimes of sexual abuse, spiking, and stalking, all come under the definition of violence against women and girls. When the Government talk about the need to reduce violence against women and girls they actually include men. which means that men are minimised and are not seen. You can see that communications from successive Governments and the College of Policing—the NPCC—are not referring to men and boys in their own right as men and boys, which undermines the application of the Act.

The Chair: You are absolutely right. There will be situations in which men are experiencing abuse. We know that. One thing that seems to be recognised at the heart of this is that an imbalance in power is often at the base of abusive relationships where somebody becomes vulnerable. You will get a male in a relationship with another male where there could be power imbalances. Equally, because of disabilities or by virtue of their own personality, somebody could be at the receiving end of abuse. Children can be used by couples, because of gender stereotyping, as a reason for cruel behaviour to take place. There is recognition of that in this committee but are there specific things you feel that the legislation has failed to do? We know the preponderance of abuse is happening to and experienced by women and girls, although there are cases that involve men. How could this Bill be improved to deal with the things that concern you?

Mark Brooks: It is not a competition; there is full recognition that there are more female victims than male victims. Our charity fully supports all measures that are vitally needed to support women and girls. It is not a competition; I just want to be crystal clear on that.

The legislation is really good but it is not being applied. We are concerned about the training that statutory agencies receive because it is not deep enough. Men are often minimised in that training, which includes GBT+ men and others. We are also seeing a lack of prosecutions, especially around coercive and controlling behaviour. The police and CPS are not quite getting the issue about coercive and controlling behaviour as part of domestic abuse sentencing, which applies to women and men. There is a lack of professional inquiry from indirect services such as GPs, the NHS, housing, and social workers. The police get it because they are dealing with the front-line issue as they see it; it is the indirect services that will be in contact with domestic abuse victims but not all the time. It is the application that is the challenge.

Q89 Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede: As everyone will know, the Act sets out the definition of domestic abuse and we have heard that that is welcome. It included financial abuse, emotional abuse, and a definition of how people are “personally connected”. The question to the panel is: how effective do you think these definitions are? How effectively do they operate in the communities you are seeking to represent?

Bridget Symonds: Referring to my earlier point, the ongoing issue is to do with the fact that there are many specific abuse types that LGBT+ people face which fall underneath those categories and may not be identifiable to generic service providers. There are particular issues around using chemsex, exploitative behaviours, taking away medication, and outing people, and things I have already mentioned.

The main issue for Galop is around personally connected. The personally connected definition is really useful in that it includes current and previous marriages and civil partners, but for us there is definitely a gap where it is too narrow. It is a key issue for us in thinking about people who are living in non-traditional family structures. It might be polyamorous relationships, long-term housemates, and carers, which I know will be something for the other panellists as well, and what that means. We know there are jurisdictions in the world, particularly in Australia, where there is a wider definition around personally connected. I would say that is the main issue for us. The second issue is around identifying those behaviours and what they actually look like for LGBT people.

The Chair: Richard, you described elder abuse as often coming to the attention of authorities by virtue of those wider connections. Is the definition of personally connected wide enough? Does it work in your field?

Richard Robinson: It is the relationship with the carer and the caring. Our sector is fairly unique, as is Angie’s, in that we are dealing with a caring profession and dealing with professionals. There is a key gap within the current definition in the parameters of the Act, which means abuse linked to care, dependency, and support is less clearly articulated. There is quite a large gap there.

The Chair: You are saying that if someone is older, has disabilities, and needs someone to dress and bathe them—a very intimate connection—and is coming to do that in the person’s home then it is usually a paid-for relationship rather than a relationship of kinship and can involve abuse.

Richard Robinson: That is abuse; it is domestic abuse. Most of the abuse we deal with on a day-to-day basis is committed in the older person’s own home. That is the vast majority. While the majority of our casework is familial abuse, which would be mainly sons, daughters, relatives, and intimate partners, there are volunteers and carers who are intimately involved because of the nature of their relationship from a caring perspective.

The Chair: Who would have paid for it? Would a local authority have paid for it?

Richard Robinson: There are volunteers who undertake these roles as well.

The Chair: I want to know, if a paid-for employee of the local health authority is the person who is doing the caring and is being unkind and cruel, would that count as domestic abuse?

Richard Robinson: Absolutely. It is really interesting that you have asked that question because it is one of our biggest challenges as an organisation. If it is not part of domestic abuse legislation, where else does it sit? We are dealing with 75,000 touch-point complaints issues per year. I have already made the point that there are 2.7 million potential victims per year, yet the abuse of older people is one of the most marginalised and unheard issues from a domestic abuse perspective. Mark’s point around male victims can be echoed with older people. VAWG legislation does not particularly help us.

The Chair: Acronyms are always a problem for our listening audience.

Richard Robinson: Violence against women and girls. One of the other weaknesses is that, while the appointment of a Domestic Abuse Commissioner was welcomed, in operations, that organisation barely touches upon the abuse of older people even though 60% to 70% of our victims are women. It is a really tough one. There is a lot of work to be done to look at how to better represent older people from a domestic abuse perspective within this Act, within the violence against women and girls’ sector, and the fact that there is no such thing as a violence against older people strategy.

The Chair: Is there anything you want to add, Angie? It covers the issue of how disabled people are vulnerable, often from their own partner, husband, wife, carers, relatives, and people who are around them because of their physical disadvantages.

Angie Airlie: Stay Safe East made representations, while this Act was going through the Bill stage, that carers should be included within the personally connected definition on the basis that carers have greater

intimate access and relationships with disabled people than perhaps any other person in their life. The issue is that existing legislation covering this, whether in regard to unpaid or professional carers, does not have the same teeth that the Domestic Abuse Act has. It was really a missed opportunity to include carers as a category of personally connected.

I will just give you a couple of examples of clients who have been affected. We had one client who had dementia and was consistently being psychologically abused by the carer. They were also putting the family down and belittling them. We had a situation where a client was being denied showers because it was too much trouble for the carers, who had a limited period of time, and another where theft was going on and the client was too scared to report it because they did not want to be denied the care provision, so it still remains an issue.

The Chair: Mark, do you want to add anything to that? I can see the ways in which it interacts when there are male elders and male disabled persons.

Mark Brooks: I have nothing to add to what my colleagues said bar the issue I mentioned about economic abuse and coercive controlling behaviour not always being seen by statutory authorities affecting men. It is again the application, but personally connected makes a real difference.

The Chair: With coercive and controlling behaviour, sometimes less powerful people in a relationship can in quite sophisticated ways become coercive. That is something that has to be recognised in all this and is perhaps quite often missed. The person who might seem less powerful can actually acquire or find ways, particularly around children and the way in which relationships are forged between children and a male parent, to develop that behaviour. We know there are ways that it can operate, even in the hands of the less powerful partner.

Q90 **Baroness Rafferty:** I do not know whether anybody else wanted to ask, but what exactly are conversion practices?

Bridget Symonds: The way we understand it is that it is anything that is used to suppress, cure, or change somebody's sexual or gender identity. It is often deemed to be in religious settings. We know it happens there, but it actually happens more widely.

The Chair: It can happen within families. I happen to have chaired something in relation to this. Where families do not like the idea that one of their children is saying they might be gay, or is presenting in ways that alarm them, then they often seek to try to subvert that. It is that kind of conversion attempt and it happens more widely than people might be aware of.

Bridget Symonds: The key point in relation to what we are discussing is that there is a huge intersection with so-called conversion practices being used as abusive behaviour towards people. We are talking about domestic abuse and sexual violence. It is happening and is a prevalent

issue. The issue again is that nobody is able to identify it because we do not have that knowledge. Successive Governments have said there will be a conversion practices ban but it has not happened. It is something Galop is really trying to push for because it impacts a huge amount of people within the LGBT community and often happens in families.

The Chair: It involves coercive and controlling behaviours.

Bridget Symonds: Absolutely, and some horrifying behaviours that intersect with honour-based abuse. It might be that someone is forced into a marriage or so-called corrective sexual violence is used to try to change, suppress, or cure their gender identity or sexual orientation. These play out in very serious and risky behaviours, which often intersect with that domestic abuse piece.

Baroness Rafferty: That is very helpful.

Q91 **Baroness Sugg:** Mark, you mentioned in your introduction that the legislation is good but it is not really being applied. I just wanted to ask the panel how you think the police and courts are implementing the provision for the people in the communities you work with. You have talked a bit about the difficulty around coercive and controlling behaviour, and what your experiences are of the special measures brought in by the Bill for the courts.

Mark Brooks: In terms of special measures and the courts, our main issue is with the process before that. We hear on the helpline and from speaking to partners that men are not being believed by the police. We have issues where the man has provided evidence and made a phone call to the police, but he is the one who has been told to leave the property. We still have a lot of men calling us to say that they had gone to the police or the GP but had not been believed or they felt they had to really prove they were a victim. They felt that because they are male. I know women have those challenges as well but that is the impression they have.

There have been recent cases around the link between male victims and suicide. The latest police statistics found that about 21% of homicide suicides are male victims. We feel that is underplaying it because we still have challenges with coroners not accepting men dying by suicide. We are regularly in touch with mothers who call us to say that their sons died by suicide. They have tried to get the police to open a case; they have evidence, and the police have not taken it seriously. The key thing is that men are not always believed partly because of societal views about domestic abuse and the lack of training received on male victims, and the suicide angle. Fourteen men a day die by suicide. It is going up in the UK and some of that will be because of domestic abuse.

Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede: I have a supplementary on that. Mark, one of the issues we met previously and talked about was within the family courts and the private law applications of men being reluctant to identify their own mental vulnerability while applying to see their

children. I cannot remember whether the conversation was with you or somebody else, but is there an identifiably higher rate of suicide in men who are in this position and do not want to tell the court of their own vulnerability or go to a GP because they think it will undermine their claim to see their children?

Mark Brooks: Working with other organisations such as Both Parents Matter—it used to be Families Need Fathers—it is certainly what it picks up from its helpline. We see that men fear the consequences within the family court system of actually disclosing vulnerability.

The Chair: Or mental health issues.

Mark Brooks: Yes, mental health issues and other vulnerabilities are constant themes that we and they see.

Q92 **Baroness Sugg:** Does any other member of the panel want to come in on this question around the police and courts implementation for LGBT, the elderly, or the disabled?

Bridget Symonds: The ongoing issues for us are around structural barriers that LGBT people face in reporting. We have constantly been told by people who come through the door at Galop that they are experiencing anti-LGBT+ prejudice and discrimination from across statutory services and in lots of settings including the charities. For us, it is also around the tools that are there. We have a DASH risk checklist, which is the standardised checklist used to identify risk in domestic abuse relationships, but it is a one-size-fits-all approach. There are additional add-ons that you can use but it does not always happen. There was a recent domestic homicide review for a young man called Daniel and, while the agencies utilised the DASH checklist, they did not use the LGBT consideration risk additional checklist that you can use. Therefore, the risks were not identified for Daniel, and Daniel went on to die. In addition, it was a complex relationship, there being an older perpetrator, so people did not understand that it was a relationship. It really goes to the heart of this lack of understanding around what LGBT+ experiences are and what those relationships look like.

Finally, thank you for your question because there are other things around special measures, which are automatically eligible for domestic abuse survivors. We know the court system is in disarray and as a result cases are being moved. When a case was moved, one of our IDVAs experienced that the witness care service was not aware that special measures were in place and did not know in that particular court how they could set it up. The IDVA now goes to the court early to make these inquiries. If you do not know to ask, or you do not have the advocate with you, then you might not get the special measures.

The Chair: For those who might be listening, the special measures are for people who do not want to physically confront or be in the same waiting room as the person who had been their abuser or against whom they are alleging abuse. Sometimes they do not want to be able to see

the person in the courtroom because they are so vulnerable to coercion. It is often issues about screens, having different waiting areas, or about allowing a supportive person to be with somebody who is vulnerable. That is what is involved in special measures, and you are saying that it does not often happen. Would that be true in other areas as well with people with disability and so forth?

Angie Airlie: The big issue for us is the lack of accessibility and adjustments for disabled victim survivors. We consistently find that communication adjustments are not applied, accessible information is not available, and survivors are not told about specialist services. Special measures generally are accessible in that we can get them but the adjustments that allow victim survivors to fully participate in the criminal justice system are often not available.

The Chair: They are not satisfactory. Richard, how often do elder abuse cases come before the courts in any event? Are there deficits on the investigation side?

Richard Robinson: While the Act has improved the legal framework, implementation across policing and courts remains age blind. A big issue we have is that there is a struggle to recognise what abuse is in older people. For example, abuse is often not physical. Perpetrators are often not partners. Harm is cumulative and normalised. From a special measures perspective, while those special measures and protections exist, they rely on that early and accurate identification of vulnerability. What that means in practice is that we are dealing with situations where trauma might be misread as confusion or frailty, injuries might be attributed to age rather than abuse, and capacity assumptions can undermine credibility.

The Chair: I understand and see that. As people get older, they say, "She is confused and cannot remember who did what yesterday, never mind today".

Richard Robinson: Abuse is never the first thing people think of, while in other age groups it would be. It is a consistent challenge.

Baroness Gerada: I am a GP and have recently done my safeguarding training, which is quite extensive, and elder abuse is a core part of it, including recognising the financial control that the carer might have. I am really impressed by what you are doing but I am surprised you are saying that it is so under-recognised. As a GP, we recognise it and it is quite shocking when we see it. We report it to social services and go down the safeguarding route rather than the domestic abuse or domestic violence route. Clearly, you are seeing the other end of the lens but at my end of the lens it is something that we would bring to a multidisciplinary team meeting, we would see it at a home visit and see it if the patient is dirty, all sorts of things.

Richard Robinson: It is a question of how things are identified. Every charity will say that there is more abuse under the surface than they are

ever likely to see or recognise. The point I was trying to make is that because we are living in an ageist society, which is the lens we are looking at and not just from an Hourglass perspective, then when do we begin to realise that abuse happens to an older person? What are the consequences of that? While this Act has helped broaden that classification, we need everybody—not just GPs but police and the broader professional sector—to look at how we can better recognise the signs of abuse. I am delighted that GPs are doing that safeguarding training and it is recognised more, but we are not even scratching the surface in what we believe is out there.

The Chair: Lord Polak, you generally are very concerned about the issue of children.

Q93 **Lord Polak:** I am concerned about children, who are now recognised as victims. In your work, has it been helpful that children have been mentioned on the face of the Bill? Has it made any difference to you?

The Chair: I can see that Bridget would be concerned about the fact that adolescent children and young teenagers, who are discovering their sexuality, might start facing problems with their parents.

Bridget Symonds: Abuse against LGBT children is often a hidden form of abuse. It is often viewed as family issues or strict parenting, and there is a lack of understanding about abuse that targets fundamentally who you are. We know this is a prevalent issue for trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming children. We did some research into LGBT+ experiences of abuse from family members in 2022, and 63% of LGBT people surveyed were under 18 when they first experienced abuse from a family member. This is a really prevalent issue and the most common perpetrators of abuse against LGBT people surveyed were parents. It is to do with many things and intersects again with the conversion practices we were talking about. We know that one in five LGBT people has had conversion practices. It is something they have experienced in some form.

There is also something about children of LGBT+ parents who are often not recognised in the same way as they would be if it were a heterosexual cisgender set-up. We have a traditional view on how we see families and they are often forgotten about. The final thing I want to say, and then I will allow my colleagues to speak, is that the abuse that might be targeted at one child for their identity may often also be experienced by other children in the home who see that abuse. We are talking about a myriad of different factors that are happening for children within an LGBT+ setting.

The Chair: Mark, given your work with men and boys, were you heartened that children now being recognised as victims of domestic abuse can have a huge impact on children living in abusive households?

Mark Brooks: We were very heartened by that. To extend the issue slightly, research by the Youth Endowment Fund found that there is not a

lot of focus on the partner abuse that teenage boys get between the ages of 13 and 17, as well as teenage girls, in their own right, from other teenage partners, both male or female.

The Chair: The age issue is one we have discussed.

Mark Brooks: It is not recognised. If you are under 16 and are in an abusive but romantic relationship, it is not recognised. When they have been in a relationship with a partner, 41% of girls and 37% of teenage boys have said it has been abusive. When they are under 16, it is not really being recognised. I have raised the point before but, where the adults are committing the abuse, a boy is described as a victim of violence against a girl in government policy, which is a barrier.

The last area is the manipulation of relationships, which you and Lord Ponsonby referred to. Certainly, the current Government's proposal to remove the presumption of shared parenting under the Children Act will have a knock-on effect for both fathers and mothers. Our fear and the fear of other organisations and academics is that it could exacerbate problems within the family court system as there is no longer a starting point, in many respects, for magistrates, judges, and the judiciary to look at. It is going to have an adverse effect on the children of both mothers and fathers. There is a knock-on effect of that, which means that under the Domestic Abuse Act there is a risk that children will be more severely affected by its removal.

The Chair: One area of concern raised is that of teenage boys. Often the mother may be on her own having perhaps been in a violent relationship with the father of the child, so the child is brought up in a violent environment. That teenage boy is then violent towards the mother, often over wanting money or things bought for him and so forth. Women end up having to lift the phone to the police about abuse from their teenage sons. Is that something you have had dealings with, or any of you had dealings with?

Richard Robinson: It is not just teenage sons against their mothers. It is teenage sons against their grandparents, whether they are male or female, because there is a presumption of vulnerability there. We probably need to look at how we address the notion that it is a male-female thing. It could be teenage boys on their grandfathers. Where vulnerability exists, there is an opportunity. Abuse is also a breach of trust, which is what we are talking about with the abuse of older people. It is a fundamental breach of trust, which can come from learned behaviour or other platforms.

The Chair: I am mindful that there are likely to be votes very soon in the House of Lords and am keen that we try to get as many questions in as possible. We are concerned about the issue of accommodation. Angie, you had some issues about this as it affects people with disabilities. There is very little available in the refuge world or in local authority accommodation for people who are trying to escape abusive relationships.

Q94 **Baroness Rafferty:** There is a duty upon local authorities to provide accommodation for victims and children. I wondered what your experience of it actually is in terms of its comprehensiveness, and are there any gaps that you are aware of?

Angie Airlie: As I have already alluded to, disability is a huge gap. We are not seeing the needs of disabled people considered within local authority commissioning. One issue we have is that domestic abuse refuge accommodation is generally provided by housing associations or the local authority. It often tends to be older housing stock. As it stands at the moment, the reliance is on the property owner or the landlord to make adjustments. There is no legal requirement for them to do that; it has not been built into law. Essentially, we are dealing with a situation where there might be a will to have additional disabled units or accessible units but it is not happening. One thing that we would really like to see is a move towards a national commissioning model with standards for different types of specialist accommodation. It would obviously include accessible accommodation but also accommodation that could support LGBT people, particularly trans victim survivors and those without recourse to public funds.

Mark Brooks: Very briefly, I wholeheartedly support what Angie said. With regard to male victims, and that includes male victims of honour-based abuse and forced marriage, it is a postcode lottery. It is the same for children as well.

The Chair: Can I pause there? There are going to be votes. We were going to ask you for any recommendations you would like to share with us. You can do this in writing. You have already mentioned a number of shortcomings, and we will be looking at ways that those shortcomings might be met. You have also enlightened us about specific communities being disadvantaged in particular areas. Could you also send us in writing any pressing abuse issues that you have not had an opportunity to mention? If there is something you feel you would have liked to have said but have not had time to say, then please send it to us in writing. If you have a recommendation you would like to make specifically, then send it to us in writing and it will be incorporated into the evidence.

Your coming today has been really useful. I am particularly mindful of the fact that there are transport problems here in London today so I think it is better that we close this now and people can vote, but you can also get on your way. We learned a lot from you and your evidence has been really important to this committee's work. Thank you so much.