

Written evidence from Honor Rhodes OBE, Tavistock Relationships [MHM0004]

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to make this short submission to the Women and Equalities Committee's inquiry into the mental health of boys and men.

We would like to draw on the most authoritative review of the evidence regarding children's mental health and interparental conflict (Harold et al., 2016) which states that while 'the effects of inter-parental conflict may be similarly damaging for boys and girls [...] boys and girls may react differently to hostility and conflict between parents [...] with family stress representing a greater risk for girls during adolescence, whereas it is associated with risk for boys, especially externalising problems, earlier in development' (Harold et al., 2016).

Given that the most recent data on children's mental health (https://files.digital.nhs.uk/97/B09EF8/mhcyp_2021_rep.pdf) shows that boys aged 6 to 10 years were more likely to have a probable mental disorder (21.9%) than girls (12.0%), and in 17 to 23 year olds, this pattern was reversed, with rates higher in young women (23.5%) than young men (10.7%), we should be paying particular attention to the aggressive, hostile and anti-social (externalising) behaviours which boys (younger ones especially) are likely to demonstrate in response to conflict between their parents.

We applaud the call made by your committee in its letter to Nadine Dorries for a national men's strategy, and would urge you to please recommend to Government that any such strategy looks closely on the differential impact - in terms of mental health outcomes and behaviours - which parental conflict has on boys. With 12% of children living in households where at least one parent reports relationship distress, we feel that the need for such a men's strategy focusing on this area is paramount.

Of course the Government has been doing good work in this area, with a recent evaluation indicating the Reducing Parental Conflict programme (funded by the DWP) to be highly successful, in particular the mentalization-based therapy intervention (one of the eight interventions being tested in the programme) - https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1042480/rpc-evaluation-second-report-on-implementation.pdf

March 2022