

Written evidence submitted by The ManKind Initiative (COR0096)

Executive Summary

1. This submission is based on the support for male victims of domestic abuse including any children they may have in their household.
2. The charity has seen an increase in usage of both its telephone helpline (30%) and visitors to its website since the lockdown period started in earnest. This mirrors other national helplines
3. Local services supporting male victims have not seen increases in demand primarily because men are not being referred/signposted to them by local and other national agencies. They are unable to come forward to seek help and are likely not to know there are local services which may be driving higher demands on national helplines like ours.
5. The lack of refuge and safe houses is a cause of concern as there are not enough places for men to escape to (only four organisations of 33 had spaces for men in the week of 20 April 2020). Some areas such as London do not have any places at all.
4. The charity believes many men are unable to reach out for support because they are in lockdown' with their abuser making them more isolated, more vulnerable and more susceptible to violence, psychological and emotional abuse. We are fearful that this will lead to an increase in men thinking or actually taking their own lives because of domestic abuse as they think it is only means of escape.
5. There has been marked increase in the number of men contacting the charity because of the deliberate breach in Child Arrangement Orders by their ex-partners. This is a form of domestic abuse as it is psychological, emotional and financial control. The charity also called for Parental Alienation to be included in the new Domestic Abuse Bill.
6. There has also been an increase in the number of men calling the helpline because their counselling appointments are not going ahead – this includes men not affected by domestic abuse but who want to talk to any helpline where they will be listened to. This means men who are suffering domestic abuse cannot get through.
7. Covid 19 has exposed clear political and structural problems in supporting and recognising male victims. The political and media narrative has erased male and LGBT+ victims of domestic abuse and the public policy flaws of

placing male victims of domestic abuse under the “Ending Violence Against Women and Girls” Strategy exacerbates this.

8. The charity is waiting to see how inclusive the Government's “You Are Not Alone” campaign is on recognising and supporting both male, LGBT+ and other marginalised victims.
 9. Post Covid 19, there will be an increase in male victims (and all victims) seeking legal redress through the police (as they will have the chance to report it). In addition, there will be more psychological support and counselling needed. This has to be planned for as part of any exit strategy.
 10. It is vital that there is more investment in domestic abuse services as a whole and this must include support for male victims. The extra investment by the Government is welcome albeit could have happened more quickly.
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About the ManKind Initiative

11. The ManKind Initiative is the first British charity to support male victims of domestic abuse and we are the main charity in the UK solely dedicated to male victims. Since 2001, we have been at the forefront of providing services, support and campaigning for male victims ensuring that they (and their children) receive the support and recognition they need. Statistics on male victims of domestic abuse can be found in Annex A.
 12. Our aim is to ensure all male victims of domestic abuse are supported to enable them to be free from the situation they are in. We are gender inclusive in our approach so whilst we are a service provider for men, we want all victims (and their children) whatever their gender to be free from abuse too so do not want services or funding switched from female to male victims. We do not believe domestic abuse support and recognition for victims should be based on a “competition” between the genders.
 13. Our core services include a national helpline which receives over 2,000 calls per year (25% of calls are from family members, friends and work colleagues – often women), a popular website, an accredited training programme and a national conference.
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The prevalence of these issues since the Government issued 'stay at home' guidance on 23 March

Services Usage

14. **Telephone Support:** Calls to the ManKind Initiative helpline in the last three weeks since 30th March 2020 are 35% higher than in the pre Covid-19 period. There was an initial fall in the week before and the week after lockdown (a lot of employers were sending people home on the week before the 23rd) but the period thereafter is now higher than normal.
15. **Website:** Visitors to the ManKind Initiative website are 20% higher since 30th March 2020, however this is increasing all of the time and the week between (13-19th April 2020) saw visitors as 40% higher than normal.
16. **Refuges Places:** Currently, there are 37 organisations providing refuge/safe house accommodation with 204 bed spaces, only 40 of those places are dedicated for men. Many parts of the UK have limited places or none at all – for instance London has no spaces. Through our Male Domestic Abuse Network, the charity provides a weekly update on the number of these places available every Monday. Of those 33 who were contacted on 20 April 2020, only four refuges/safe houses had spaces. This is a similar position to previous weeks.
17. **Local Services:** The charity regularly speaks to organisations and practitioners. Over the past week, they have reported a slowdown in the number of men coming forward or being referred to them, mainly because they cannot get out to access help or agencies that would refer clients to them are not fully operational. A discussion with practitioners on 17 April noted that Parental Alienation and breaches in Child Arrangement Orders was a theme that was coming through.

Issues being raised

18. **Isolation means heightened risk:** male victims like female victims, are at higher risk as many are now isolated at home with their abuser. They are therefore more easily controlled through violence, psychological abuse and isolation. It is harder for those men to seek a safe space to reach out for help. Given that 11% of men who are victims of partner abuse consider killing themselves, during the current Covid 19 period and in the months after it is very likely this percentage will be higher. This is due to the increase in psychological abuse that they will be enduring because they are with their abuser 24/7.
19. **Custody and Child Arrangement Orders:** A number of fathers are now contacting the charity stating that the other parent of their child/children are using the Covid-19 lockdown as a reason to breach existing Child

Arrangement Orders. This is despite the fact that the Government has issued guidance to state that the lockdown should not be used as a reason to breach Child Arrangement Orders unless through mutual agreement. Other practitioners have also said that a number of their clients are complaining of this and there have been media reports (Guardian 7 April) of lawyers “inundated by divorced parents arguing over lockdown custody.” See Paragraphs 31 and 32 for more information.

20. **Cancellation of Counselling:** We have had a number of men contacting the charity because their appointments with counsellors or other forms of support have been cancelled or have reduced availability and they want someone to talk to. This is particularly prevalent in relation to mental health support.

Measures or proposals to help support victims of domestic abuse and child abuse at this time

21. The charity believes that the measures or proposals to help male victims of domestic abuse have fully exposed the structural, political and societal barriers and flaws to supporting male victims. Many of these flaws also apply to LGBT+ and other marginalised victims.

Lack of recognition:

22. Despite the fact that male victims account for one in every three victims of abuse they have been absent and removed from the political and media narrative on domestic abuse.
23. The media/political narrative continues to be all focussed on female victims and not on all victims, effectively minimising and erasing awareness and the voice of male, LGBT+ and other marginalised victims. It has regressed ten years to some sort of default position. This was seen initially as a ‘blip’ when the lockdown started (as seen by media reports on call figures on 6th April) but has become the norm. This is despite offers of support having been made. Evidence includes:
 - Announcement by Government on its “You Are Not Alone” campaign featured a quote just about female victims (offers were made by ManKind to be included) when it could have been 360° – it is hoped this was a one off. It is noteworthy that this is the slogan used by our charity for over ten years.

- Sky News ran a feature on Saturday just featuring a female DA narrative (offer had been to appear).
 - The media also covered the story about the number of women who had sadly been killed through domestic homicides (no men have been reported as the same), however, that is obviously acceptable and expected coverage given this has been an issue particularly prevalent for female victims.
24. The charity welcomes the Home Office “You Are Not Alone” Campaign in principle but it must ensure that the campaign is inclusive so that male victims themselves, support services and the society recognise this is an issue that affects men and their children too.
 25. This lack of recognition clearly exposes the political and structural deficit in recognising male victims of domestic abuse.
 26. One reason is because the view of Government, key stakeholders and the main organisations in the domestic abuse field is that they view domestic abuse as a “gendered crime” (a crime against women because of their gender), this therefore relegates and minimises both male and LGBT+ victims as a group and as individuals.
 27. This is exacerbated when all male victims are classed as being victims of crimes against women and girls. This is why there is a growing and increasingly recognised need to ensure there is an “Ending Intimate Violence Against Men and Boys” Strategy in parallel to the successful and welcome “Ending Violence Against Women and Girls” Strategy.

Lack of services

28. The increase in calls to the ManKind Initiative, other services such as the Men’s Advice Line, the lack of refuge places and the potential invisibility of local services shows there needs to be wholesale investment in services for male victims. From discussions with practitioners and also from readouts from other meetings, it seems that victims are tending to call national helplines and services rather than local services because they do not know they are available, how to access them or that they even exist.
29. The lack of refuge and safe houses for male victims is a serious concern. There is no point in the Government stating that victims should escape when there are not the places to escape to which of course includes fathers with children who need to escape. This increases risk and harm to both and in the charity's view increases the risk of suicidal feelings because for some men they will feel it is the only escape route they have. There needs to be an

improvement in positive response from the Police and other agencies to support men and their children to remain safely in their homes wherever possible with the proper and increased use of criminal and civil orders such as DVPN/DVPOs, Restraining Orders, Occupation Orders and Non-Molestation Orders. Breaches of these orders need to be taken seriously and consequences issued.

30. It is also unclear at the present time how much of the extra investment including the £2 million for helplines and additional charity related money will be available to support male victims. The additional problem is whether the sector is able to increase capacity in time to support them and support them well. It is also unclear at the present time whether the 24/7 National Domestic Abuse Helpline is available to male victims and if not, as well as male victims not being able to access support 24/7 there are also clear equalities legislation implications. The latter is because the Government is providing a lesser support service to individuals solely because of their gender.

Parental Alienation / Breach in Child Arrangement Orders

31. Despite clear guidance from both the Government and the Courts and Tribunals Judiciary that Child Arrangement Orders should continue through the lockdown, from the experience of the callers the charity is hearing that some parents are using Covid-19 to deliberately breach the orders, knowing there is little or no consequence.
32. This is causing additional psychological distress to ex-partners and is a form of controlling behaviour. The problem with the legislation as it stands is the only remedy is to go back to the family courts (incurring additional costs and delay). The current law in England Wales also means that the law on controlling behaviour does not include ex-partners who are not living in the same household. This shows there has to be changes in the forthcoming Domestic Abuse Bill to ensure this type of psychological abuse and controlling behaviour is a criminal offence alongside parental alienation which is likely to also increase during this period. Consideration should be given for children whose parent is or has been experiencing Domestic Abuse to be given access to education provision as 'vulnerable' children in the same way as children of key workers so that they can continue having safe contact handover via school to minimise the impact of parents meeting and the victim's risk to be monitored by school staff.

Measures or proposals to reduce or avert domestic abuse and child abuse at this time;

33. Given the situation with lockdown leaving victims being isolated at home with their abusers, a reduction of available support services and a lack of opportunity to contact them, it is always going to be difficult to reduce or avert domestic abuse at this time from a statutory or societal perspective. This is why ensuring that there are services available both now and post Covid 19 is important, as is the need to ensure the narrative is inclusive and that those committed domestic abuse know there will be consequences for their behaviour.
 34. The key, therefore, is that there has to be strong messaging to perpetrators that there will be consequences for them and to ensure that all victims are encouraged to get support now and after the lockdown. The key will be to make sure there is enough resource capacity to manage the increased demand that is likely to come post Covid 19 – not just in terms of legal remedies (more reports to the police and courts) but also in increased demand on local services such as DA services, counsellors and mental health provision more widely.
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Preparedness of responders and service providers to address the needs of victims during the pandemic;

35. It is clear that the pandemic has not been planned for, but due to its nature, this is understandable. The question is how well the system can respond during this period and after. The sector as a whole is doing the best it can in the circumstances and this should be both welcomed and applauded. There should be no criticism in this area.
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The effectiveness of Government advice, co-ordination and support for responders and service providers;

36. The Government has, in our opinion, been reactive to Covid-19 and its impact on domestic abuse. Therefore, it has been trying to play catch up rather than being proactive in its response. This has continued to cause a deficit in the support available and the ability for the sector to react. This causes concern for charities like ours and other helplines, in being able to ensure they are not only able to support current levels of victims but also meet the increasing demand.
 37. We welcome the “You Are Not Alone” campaign but it is too early to judge how supportive it will be of male and LGBT+ and other marginalised victims.
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Annex 1: Statistics

1. 3.8% of men (786,000) and 7.5% of women (1.6 million) were victims of domestic abuse in 2018/19 equating to a ratio of two female victims to every one male victim. For every three victims of domestic abuse, two will be female, one will be male.¹
2. 576,000 men (2.5% men) and 1.2 million (4.8% women) were victims of partner abuse in 2018/19 equating to a ratio of two female victims to every one male victim.²
3. In 2017/18, 11% of male victims (7.2% women) have considered taking their life due to partner abuse.³
4. In 2017/18, nearly half of male victims fail to tell anyone they are a victim of domestic abuse (only 51% tell anyone). They are nearly three times less likely to tell anyone than a female victim (49% of men fail to tell anyone as opposed to 19% women). This has worsened since 2015/16 where the figures were 61% for men (88% women).⁴
5. In 2018/19 – 16 men (80 women) were killed at the hands of their current or ex-partner.⁵
6. In terms of refuges/safe houses, currently, there are 37 organisations with 204 spaces with only 40 of those places are dedicated for men. Many parts of the UK have no or limited places at all – for instance London has no spaces⁶.

Further facts can be found about male victims of domestic abuse can be found through the summary “50 key facts about male victims of domestic abuse” at : <https://www.mankind.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/50-Key-Facts-about-Male-Victims-of-Domestic-Abuse-and-Partner-Abuse-March-2020-final.pdf>

¹ ONS domestic abuse: findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales: year ending March 2019 (<https://bit.ly/3cXPfc9>)

² ONS domestic abuse: findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales: year ending March 2019 (<https://bit.ly/3cXPfc9>)

³ ONS domestic abuse: findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales: year ending March 2018 (<https://bit.ly/2FY8UYc>)

⁴ ONS domestic abuse: findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales: year ending March 2018 (<https://bit.ly/2FY8UYc>)

⁵ ONS Homicide in England and Wales (year ending March 2019) - <https://bit.ly/2VM3aw3>

⁶ The ManKind Initiative