

Written evidence submitted by The ManKind Initiative (MRS0177)

Executive Summary

1. The main focus of this submission is on the impact of male victims of domestic abuse, their protected characteristics and the need to look ahead to six months' time.
2. The main concern is regarding the psychological impact on male victims and the longer term damage that will cause including heightened suicide risk.
3. In addition, the negative effect on men due to the closure of other services such as mental health appointments or counselling sessions has had an impact on service providers as men search for alternatives like helplines run by charities such as this.
4. We have also raised changes that can be made in the Domestic Abuse Bill that can alleviate some of the issues that arising for male victims now and in the future which are related to Coronavirus or the actions of those who have used it as an excuse for their coercive and controlling behaviour.
5. We also believe that impact has shown the clear need for more investment in services for male victims of domestic abuse, more investment in men's mental health and improvements in the justice system.

About the ManKind Initiative

6. 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.
7. 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.
8. 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.

Your experiences. We want to know:

Q2: If there have been specific impacts on people due to them having a protected characteristic

Impact on services

9. This submission focussed on men who are victims of domestic abuse during the Coronavirus and have been impacted by it. They include men who have been in contact with the charity, other organisations in local communities that support and also views from other charities that support them.
10. **Telephone Support:** Calls to the ManKind Initiative helpline 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 50% higher than in the pre Covid-19 period with increases in visits to the help sections.
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 34 who were contacted on 27 April 2020, only five 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 of the home 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.

Effects of Covid-19 on Male Victims of Domestic Abuse

18. **Isolation means heightened risk of psychological harm and suicide:** 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 men¹ 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. As is well known, 75% of the deaths² by suicide are men.

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 means men are searching for others to talk to:** 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.

Reviewing the measures

Q2. What needs to change or improve, which could be acted on in 6 months' time

21. Given the immediacy of the measures being put in place by the Government, the charity believes the longer term issues are more important.

Mental Health Investment

22. It is clear (and this was point made by this very Committee in the previous Parliament in its findings on the mental health of men and boys) that there “*is a need to create and implement easy to access, male-friendly mental health services, with improved signposting.*” The damage undergone by male victims of domestic especially psychologically is an area that will require addressing, both in terms of investment in service provision and also awareness. There has to be a proactive strategy and we believe the best way to ensure this investment is targeted at male and female victims but in a way that both can see that the service and support is tailored for them.

Domestic Abuse Bill: Child Arrangement Orders

23. In terms of Child Arrangement Order breaches, we believe that this can be tackled via the Domestic Abuse Bill. This action (against the advice of the Government and the Courts and Tribunals Judiciary) is causing additional psychological distress to ex-partners and is a form of controlling behaviour.

24. 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. This would allow police intervention.

Investment in Services for Male Victims of Domestic Abuse

25. 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. More investments at a local and national level are therefore needed.
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.
30. 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. This includes 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.

Annex 1: Statistics about Male Victims of Domestic Abuse

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.³
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.⁴
3. In 2017/18, 11% of male victims (7.2% women) have considered taking their life due to partner abuse.⁵

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).⁶
5. In 2018/19 – 16 men (80 women) were killed at the hands of their current or ex-partner.⁷
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 spaces⁸.

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>

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¹ ONS domestic abuse: findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales: year ending March 2018 (<https://bit.ly/2FY8UYc>) - Table 14-15

² ONS Suicides in the UK: 2018 registrations <https://bit.ly/3aMixbC>

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

⁴ ONS domestic abuse: findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales: year ending March 2019 (<https://bit.ly/3cXPfc9>)

⁵ ONS domestic abuse: findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales: year ending March 2018 (<https://bit.ly/2FY8UYc>)

⁶ ONS domestic abuse: findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales: year ending March 2018 (<https://bit.ly/2FY8UYc>)

⁷ ONS Homicide in England and Wales (year ending March 2019) - <https://bit.ly/2VM3aw3>

⁸ The ManKind Initiative