

Written evidence submitted by MensCraft (MRS0286)

Male victims of DA/V during the COVID-19 pandemic

The surge in incidence of domestic abuse and violence during the coronavirus pandemic has been widely reported with some campaigners warning of a 'domestic abuse pandemic' that may follow from the isolation and social distancing of victims with their perpetrators during the current lockdown. Calls to the National Domestic Abuse helpline are up by 25% since the beginning of the lockdown; visits to the organisation's website are up by 150%; and thirteen women and four children have been killed by abusers, twice the usual number of two per week.

What is less well publicised is the equally shocking rise in numbers of male victims with female perpetrators in the same period. Calls to hotlines set up for male victims are up by an average of 20% since the lockdown began and visits to websites are up by between 20% and 40%.

A second, disturbing trend is evident in the increased number of fathers contacting charities to report that their exes are using the Covid-19 lockdown as a reason for breaching existing Custody and Child Arrangement Orders put in place as part of shared parenting provisions. These breaches are occurring despite Government guidance that the lockdown should not be used to breach these orders unless mutually agreed by both parents.

Such breaches are a form of domestic abuse as they are a form of controlling behaviour and psychological/emotional abuse of both the men and their children. Additionally, they can be understood as a form of financial abuse as a parent whose contact has ended and whose child(ren) are being withheld may have to go back to the family courts to have contact reinstated and their Custody and Child Arrangements Order upheld.

Working with men experiencing suicidal ideation

Covid 19 has had a great impact on the men that I work with. The greatest being the lockdown, my client group has expressed their anger and annoyance at not being able to meet and continue with positive activities which they regard as good for building social skills, reducing anxiety and improving their mental health. Several clients have spoken about being victims of domestic abuse during this period of lockdown. Most report not being taken seriously or being given little, if any, support or signposting to appropriate services, and when they do the existing services not being robust enough. With relationship breakdown and issues around money being major contributors to suicidal ideation it is key to explore further routes to enable the creation of supportive environments for men.

Sadly I fear that due to the pressure that social distancing puts on male mental health it will have a profound negative effect on vulnerable men's lives for months if not years to come.

Working with men experiencing self harm / suicidal ideation in the prison population

I am working with men who are at risk of suicide and due to be released from Norwich prison. I am supporting them up to and after release with basic needs such as housing and benefits, alongside support dealing suicide ideation, self-harm and feelings of hopelessness.

Many of the men are released with no fixed abode and due to the Corona outbreak and lockdown procedures are being placed in hotels and bed and breakfasts. Most of the men released to Norwich are being placed out of their area to Ipswich away from friends, family and support networks. They are having to register at new GPs, access drug and alcohol services and other support services in an unknown area whilst dealing with overwhelming feelings of anxiety. Some are not even able to open a letter and read it due to their anxieties or fill out a registration form for a new GP. Men are describing coming out of one prison to another prison that is even more difficult to deal with because of the severe isolation. For many of these men self-isolation is a worrying sign of a deterioration in their mental health, so an enforced isolation is a concern for these men. Men are feeling that they are unable to progress and move on and some have concerns that they will go back to negative habits that they are familiar with to cope. One client is in an approved premises, which he shares with 2 others, it appears that the rules of social distancing are not being adhered to and that there are numerous guests entering the accommodation, increasing the risk of spreading the virus. Due to this client is too afraid to use the communal areas including the kitchen to prepare food. Is this an issue in other premises?

Regular supportive telephone contact is helping to alleviate feelings of being overwhelmed and feeling hopeless.

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