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VAWG Strategy: Call For Evidence “Meeting the Male Survivors Test”

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Further Details

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(Section A) Introduction and Executive Summary

About the ManKind Initiative

- 1.1 The ManKind Initiative charity (formed in 2001) was the first charity in Great Britain to support male victims of domestic abuse. We take a modern 21st century inclusive and equality-based view of domestic abuse and believe that there needs to be more support and recognition for both women and men within the full range of Protected Characteristics. We recognise there are more female victims than male victims and do not want funding taken away from female victims to be given to men, we want more funding for all.
- 1.2 Our core services include a national helpline (2,000 calls per year), National Service Standards, a training programme and a national information service for agencies. We also worked in partnership with both the CPS and the Home Office on their respective statements regarding male victims of VAWG crimes.
- 1.3 A core part of our work is to ensure the voices of male victims, their children and wider family (including mothers/fathers and sisters/brothers) are heard. This includes ensuring their experiences are not minimised by gender stereotypes or the narrative about domestic abuse so they are better recognised within society and the public services.

Executive Summary

- 1.4 We believe that there a number of key changes that the Government needs to make to ensure all victims of domestic abuse, sexual violence, forced marriage, stalking, and so-called “Honour” based crimes receive the support and justice they need.
- 1.5 Whilst the focus of this submission is on male victims of domestic abuse, as the charity is a modern, inclusive, 21st century organisation, nothing here is intended to deny or downgrade the terrible experiences that female victims face. We do not seek to create a false competition between genders nor indulge in ideological arguments.
- 1.6 According to the Office for National Statistics: 757,000 men are victims of domestic abuse every year (33% of all victims), that 26% of domestic abuse related offences recorded by the police against men (c155,000 offences per year), yet only 4.4% of people supported by an IDVA service are men. In addition, only 2.5% of victims who are assessed as being high risk are men, only 5.3% of cases discussed at MARACs have male victims and half of male victims (49%) do not tell anyone at all they are a victim. *(See Annex 2: keys facts 1-7)*
- 1.7 What this shows is that there are significant numbers of male victims, but they are not being supported or recognised or in “the system”. This leaves urgent questions: **Where are they? Why are they not being supported? Why are they not being recognised? Why are they not in the system? Are they escaping? If so, how?** Ultimately, this is the crucial problem that this strategy has to answer – *“what are we as a Government, as public services and as a society going to do to ensure more male victims and their children are recognised, supported and able to leave abusive relationships - as quickly and safely as possible”*. This is what we have called the **“The Male Survivors Test”**. If this strategy does not improve or resolve this – and answer these questions then any new strategy fails them and any children they have.
- 1.8 All proposals which are set out below, are based on the premise of how to resolve this problem, and in a way, that does not negate from the experiences or support for female victims.
- 1.9 Any comments and points made should also be in the context that the Government has made great strides in recognising and supporting male victims. Matters are far better than they were five years ago and the charity has greatly welcomed the positive approach that has been taken.
- 1.10 Annex 1 sets out the list of policies that we would want to see in any refreshed strategy and associated policy documents.
- 1.11 Annex 2 sets out a range of key statistics that act as a thread throughout this document.
- 1.12 Annex 3 sets out ten real life examples where the current Government approach to male victims of domestic abuse has to change.

Ten Policy Areas to “Meet the Male Survivors Test” (Detail Section B)

1.13 The main Policy Areas for reform that we are putting forward for any future “VAWG” Strategy to ensure the “Male Survivors Test” is met are:

- 1) **A Parallel Intimate Violence Against Men and Boys Strategy:** We propose that there should be parallel strategy with an interim/transitional position of a refreshed [Male Victims Statement](#) and [National Statement of Expectations](#) for local areas that focuses on issues in the points below. This has to also be publicised and enforced. We have led the way for over ten years in the field of domestic abuse in asking for this approach. We also welcome and support the submission from the Men and Boys Coalition which cover all the “VAWG” crimes types, in solidarity with all male victims of these crimes. As well, we support the letter from the Stand With Him group of women who call for the same. Lastly, we believe the existing approach actually increases the level of risk and harm to male victims of domestic abuse.
- 2) **Culture change:** The Government and public bodies must take a stronger stance and ensure action is taken to change societal, political and public service culture, stereotypes and narratives that reinforce the perception that domestic abuse is a crime only affecting heterosexual women and one that is only perpetrated by heterosexual men. They should lead by example.
- 3) **Improving the public sector response and ensure training is fully inclusive:** There has to be greater responsibility and accountability on public bodies (and those they commission) to ensure their staff and practices are gender-informed/inclusive, have equivalent professional curiosity and fully recognise, understand and are trained to support male victims and their children. The training must be independently reviewed and not by public service training providers, to avoid any potential conflict of interest (“marking their own homework”).
- 4) **Funding for services is increased:** Funding for male victims of domestic abuse should increase and delivery should be gender informed at a local level. There are not enough services for male victims in terms of resources within commissioned services. We believe commissioned services are not doing enough to promote their services due to funding constraints on their overall services – and therefore not being able to take on more male clients. We believe there should be clarity/transparency on how much is spent on male victims. This could be through ring-fencing and/or transparent reporting
- 5) **The Government stops explaining/describing domestic abuse by comparing statistics between genders.** Often, and unwittingly, this inherently minimises and steers the narrative away from recognition of male victims. The Government should only make comparisons within each individual gender population (for example, male victims and male non-victims) to ensure this does not happen. This approach also helps to highlight the dynamics within particular genders.

- 6) **Ensuring greater accountability of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner with respect to recognising and including male victims.**
- 7) **The creation of a national network of refuges and safe houses for male victims (and their children).** There are too few safe places with adequate support for men to escape to across the country. The Government and Local Government has to do more to support men fleeing from not just domestic abuse but also sexual violence, forced marriage and Honour Based Violence.
- 8) **Review and reform the legal definition of rape to include male and female victims who are raped by women.** At present the law of rape is unequal and therefore should be changed, there should be a commitment to reforms to address this inequality.
- 9) **Creating proactive national and local awareness campaigns specifically targeted at male and LGBTQ+ victims.** To create the culture change, awareness of support and encouragement to leave, specifically targeted campaigns are vital.
- 10) **Improvement in the support for female perpetrators of domestic abuse.** There are currently 5,000 women per year at present convicted of domestic abuse offences, but very little in terms of recognition let alone delivery of targeted support. *(See Annex 2: keys fact 20)*

(Section B) Policy Areas for Change (“Meeting the Male Survivors Test”)

(1) Policy Area 1: Parallel Intimate Violence Against Men and Boys Strategy

- 1.1 The charity’s position has been clear for a number of years that in a modern, 21st century society - with the welcome emphasis on recognising diversity, inclusion and a more gender-informed approach to supporting wellbeing – it can no longer be acceptable to class or define male victims of domestic abuse as being victims of “crimes against women and girls.” It is at one level factually incorrect but at another level both offensive to those male victims and ensures they remain second class victims/survivors
- 1.2 The charity believes it is Orwellian Doublethink for the Government to think that calling a strategy “Ending Violence Against Women and Girls” also includes men and boys too. It is clearly a contradictory position and it is concerning that the Government believes both can be true at the same time. From our experience, it is also position that members of the public, let alone male survivors, do not believe is appropriate or understand.
- 1.3 We propose therefore that there should be parallel strategy (**Intimate Violence against Men and Boys Strategy**) with an interim/transitional position of a refreshed [Male Victims Statement](#) and [National Statement of Expectations](#) for local areas that focuses on issues in the points below. This has to be publicised and enforced. We have led the way for ten years in the field of domestic abuse in asking for this parallel strategy.
- 1.4 We also welcome and support the submission from the Men and Boys Coalition which covers all the “VAWG” crime types, in solidarity with all male victims of these crimes, and the

organisations that support them. We are leading members of the Coalition and provided input to them to help with their submission. As well, we support the letter from the Stand With Him group of women who call for the same

- 1.5 We greatly welcome the continuation of an Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy. It is vitally important that this is to continue so that there is a focus and a gender informed approach to tackling those crimes when they are committed against women and girls. We also acknowledge it is important to continue to commit to international treaties such as the Istanbul Convention (which is not designed to support male victims).
- 1.6 However, in the third decade of the 21st century, it can no longer be acceptable for men and boys who are victims of these crimes, including that of domestic abuse, to be viewed through the prism of being a victim of “crimes against women and girls”. In line with the Men and Boys Coalition, we believe that this:
 - a) It is factually incorrect to class men and boys who are victims of these crimes as being women and girls;
 - b) The approach minimises, disrespects and is offensive to the lived experience of men and boys who suffer these crimes, contributing to their vulnerability. This will have been a clear theme in the responses to the research questionnaires from those men who completed it. Many stated to the charity that they found it offensive or were upset by it and some refused to complete the survey as a result. It is clear from trying to encourage men to take part in the survey, how wrong it is to include men and boys under this strategy;
 - c) Male victims of these crimes continue to be more invisible than they should be to society at large and to professionals in public services. The current Government position continually reinforces the gender stereotypes with regard to male victims (see Culture Change section) which negatively affects the support available and needs being met;
 - d) This approach means reporting rates for male victims of these crimes continues to be far too low, which in turn has an impact on service provision and funding. It is our judgment that current policies act as a disincentive and barrier to reporting;
 - e) This hampers the creation of nuanced and gender responsive statutory services and understanding at a national, regional and local level, and,
 - f) There continues to be chronic under provision of resources and funding through national, regional and local bodies.

Increase in risk and harm

- 1.7 We believe, that factoring in these points above and further points in this response (especially culture change and public service response), the inclusion of men and boys under this strategy, actually increases their risk.

- 1.8 The reasons for this position are that by making them invisible and incorrectly defining/recognising them, it hampers the positive societal and public service response they receive. In turn, this acts as a further barrier preventing them from escaping. In addition, it acts as a barrier for many men to even realise they are a victim or that if they do, they fear not being believed, feel ashamed and do not know where to turn for help. Annex 3 sets out ten examples of how this works in reality.

Stand with Him

- 1.9 The charity, in a separate submission, has included a letter from over 60 women (part of the Stand With Him group that we are responsible for) with a personal connection to a male victim of domestic abuse. This shows the level of distress and concern about the inclusion of male victims under such a strategy. We would urge the Government to listen to them and their experiences.

Position Going Forward: Transition to a Parallel Strategy

- 1.10 As set out in paragraph 1.4 we are supportive of the VAWG strategy and believe in a gender-informed, inclusive, equality and equity-based approach.
- 1.11 We recognise the difficulty the Government is currently in, when trying to ensure this strategy remains in place whilst ensuring there is support for male victims as well.
- 1.12 We therefore believe that it would be acceptable to charities, professionals and far more importantly to victims/survivors for a transitional approach to a parallel and complementary position. In essence, whilst reiterating the VAWG strategy, it initially updates its Male Victims Statement and a National Statement of Expectations developed in collaboration with the charities that support male victims. At the same time, it creates a consultation process for a parallel strategy that will eventually subsume the Male Victims Statement.

2. Policy Area 2: Culture Change

Male Survivors Test: What are we as a Government, public services and as a society going to do to ensure more male victims and their children are recognised, supported and able to leave abusive relationships - as quickly and safely as possible.

- 2.1 In management business circles, there is a phrase: “Culture eats strategy for breakfast”. This is certainly true with regard to tackling the culture of gender stereotypes and gender ideology with response to male victims of domestic abuse.
- 2.2 To meet the “Male Survivors Test”, there has to be a clear, positive and full throttle change to the pervasive culture that infuses societal and public service recognition, narratives and approaches to male victim. This culture in summary is:
- a) *“The primary focus should be on the gender of the victim not the risk and harm on each individual victim or survivor”*. This creates a false competition based on gender and not

on risk and harm, which must be the only view when it comes to priorities in recognising and responding to each victim;

- b) *“Male victims are not and cannot be victims of domestic abuse, or, or that when they are, it is only ‘on occasion’, so we should all still really just focus on female victims”*. This divisive approach is very much still resident in many parts of the national domestic abuse sector, through some training that public services receive and within the broader societal narrative;
- c) *“Men and boys with wellbeing issues deserve and need less support than women and girls”* – an empathy gap that is pervasive throughout society and public policy. This empathy gap is not just on domestic abuse, but also the wider “VAWG” crimes, suicide, educational underachievement, Covid-19 mortality rates and men's health in general;
- d) *“Domestic abuse is a ‘gendered crime”* instead of domestic abuse being seen as a crime where gender has an effect for female and male victims. The charity believes the former position is an ideological/political position and creates unnecessary division. This can be seen by the way this approach is not applied consistently by the Government to gendered issues and disadvantage - for example, the Government rightly does not describe suicide as a gendered mental health problem (75% of suicides are men) or that rough sleeping is a gendered homeless problem (85% of people who sleep rough are men). (See Annex 2: key facts 21 and 22)

2.3 This culture change manifests in four key areas, which add additional barriers for men to escape from domestic abuse. These are consistently highlighted in research from leading academics (Professor Nicola Graham-Kevan, Dr Elizabeth Bates, Dr Ben Hine and Dr Sarah Wallace), other UK research, and the experiences of front-line practitioners who support male victims (including the charity itself through its helpline).

Male perceptions

2.4 In terms of this culture, this affects a man's perception of his experience:

- a) Lack of recognition that the abusive behaviours they are experiencing is domestic abuse;
- b) When they do, they feel a sense of a shame, embarrassment and humiliation;
- c) Fear they will not be believed if they do come forward;
- d) Feel isolated, alone and do not think any other man has been or is a victim, and,
- e) Feel they have no one to confide in or services and support that will help them.

We recommend to the experiences of male victims in the 20 Stories video produced by the University of Cumbria based on research produced by Dr Elizabeth Bates: .

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZSyT3UV0D9I>

Societal Recognition/Perception

2.5 In terms of culture, this affects the societal perception of male victims:

- a) They are not always believed by friends, family, work colleagues, public services (police, health services, social services etc). They have to pass a higher believability threshold than a female victim.
- b) A lack of personal (friends, family, work colleagues) and professional curiosity (police, GP's, social services, A&E) when men are presenting or showing signs of being a victim of domestic abuse (see Annex 3 for examples from Domestic Homicide Reviews);
- c) Encourages perpetrator tactics (*Who is going to believe you?*, *What sort of a man are you?*, *All I have to do is pick the phone up to the police, and as a woman they'll always believe me rather than you*), and,
- d) They are stigmatised for getting help

Lack of public service response

2.6 In terms of how culture affects the public service responses, below are clear examples of why so few men are actually supported by local services:

- a) There continues to be a view from many in public services that it is men's fault that they are not coming forward to receive support from domestic abuse services available to them. That men and masculinity should change. This victim-blaming approach is unacceptable and driven by this pervasive culture view. It is the responsibility of public services to deliver services clearly targeted towards men and not put all the responsibility on men themselves;
- b) There is a lack of visible services even though they are commissioned by local councils and Police and Crime Commissioners. This can be seen by local services not being clear they are available for men too, a lack of gender specific awareness campaigns/communications, and that local services (GPs, solicitors, police, social services) are not aware of them. The charity is regularly called by police forces, GP's, housing bodies and councils asking for support for a victim because they are unaware that their local service supports them;
- c) The lack of awareness by public service professionals that the Care Act (2014) and Equality Act (2010) apply to male victims of domestic abuse as well. This can be seen by the fact that many GPs use the very good IRISi referral pathway system for female victims, without recognising that to comply with the Equality Act, they have to be able to provide the same level of support for a male victim who has the same of risk and harm as a female victim. This includes equivalent referral pathways.
- d) The lack of funding for domestic abuse services, is acting as a barrier for support to male victims. There is a worry that local services will not proactively publicise support for male victims, because they do not have enough money to cope with the volume of female

victims they already support. We believe that the injection of targeted funding into the domestic abuse sector will address this. It is important that local services feel this is an appropriate approach.

Lack of balanced narrative and policy making

- 2.7 In terms of how culture affects policy making can be seen in a number of ways, including in this consultation itself.
- a) We know the Government has attempted to make the “VAWG” consultation applicable to men but the tautology of the process, language and the explicitly gendered nature of the questions showed it is unable to make the consultation applicable to men. As set out earlier, many men have felt offended, upset and some refused to take part as not to give it credibility. The process itself has reinforced the barriers that men have in feeling and making their voice heard – it has reinforced their invisibility;
 - b) Far too often in national and local, policy campaigns, awareness campaign, tender documents, and speeches, the culture relegates or minimises male victims. This acts as a barrier or reinforces other barriers – preventing men from escaping. This is even when there is a breach in the Home Office Male Victims Statement especially around dual or parallel communications;
 - c) We know the Government is aware of much of this and is trying to be more inclusive, however classing men as victims of VAWG crimes and under this strategy is actually preventing them from doing so, and,
 - d) The clearest example of how this narrative and lack of balance plays out can be seen in the passage of the Domestic Abuse Bill. At the Committee stage in the House of Commons, the committee held a witness session where they interviewed a range of charities and survivors of domestic abuse. All three survivors were female victims and all charities that were interviewed represented female victims (where they described themselves as gender specific). This was despite charities supporting LGBT+ victims and male victims having made themselves available. This was and is a scandalous situation which should never be allowed to happen again (nothing here is opposing the need for those female victims and these charities to appear).
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3. Policy Area 3: Improve public service response and ensuring training is fully inclusive.

- 3.1 A key component of the implementation for the Domestic Abuse Act will be the various types of Statutory Guidance and other related policy planks, some new and some existing. These of course apply to all victims of “VAWG” crimes but the challenge for male victims of domestic abuse and support agencies is the concern and experience that these are not applied to all in practice. Albeit we accept that matters have improved since the last iteration of the VAWG strategy in 2016 and the Government is continuing to recognise the need to do more.

- 3.2 Applying to all is a fundamental tenet of the British Constitution, but we believe that in the field of domestic abuse, the public sector response is not always applied to all. This also includes where a female and a male victim have the same level of risk of harm but from the public services male victims do not always experience the same:
- level of professional curiosity
 - level of support or referral pathways
 - level of available funding (on a per survivor basis) for commissioned services
 - level of assessment if professionals using the DASH system do not adapt the question about pregnancy to state “is your partner pregnant or have they given birth in the past 18 months?”)
- 3.3 Often, the charity has only seen change on ensuring the same level of support is given when reference is made to the Equality Act (2010). Some responses we have been aware of or even when we have explained in presentations and training, is where services do not recognise they have an obligation to support male victims or do not think that a local commissioned service is also available for men.
- 3.4 Clearly if a victim presenting at services such as a GP surgery receives a higher quality/level of support and referral pathway than another solely because of their gender, this must be questioned. We have concerns that such differences in referral pathways in the health service exist especially if a service is using IRISi solely for female victims.
- 3.5 A lot of the above can be attributed to issues that have already been discussed in the previous two sections with regard to societal and professional gender stereotypes, the invisibility/minimisation of male victims in the domestic abuse narrative and the broader empathy gap towards male wellbeing. The point of defining men as victims of “VAWG” crimes contributes to this.
- 3.6 Whilst many commissioned services have made strides to be clear they are for men, others still come across as being just for female victims in terms of the language they use, the narrative and imagery on communications. This acts as a clear barrier to accessing the public services.
- 3.7 The extra dimension can also be seen about attitudes to masculinity and male help-seeking. The onus seems to be that it is a man’s fault if he does not seek support because of masculine traits such as strength and stoicism.
- 3.8 This victim blaming approach seeks to deflect away from the need for services to be more male-victim friendly by being more proactive in bringing themselves closer to men whether through male-friendly communications, websites and clear guidance to other public services such as police, GPs, social services solicitors and others.
- 3.9 Our experience, and the experience of practitioners especially in commissioned services is that men will come forward to a service if they know they will be believed that, it is clearly appropriate to them, and that there is recognition that it is not their fault. This is at the heart of the National Service Standards that we developed with Hestia UK Says No More.

- 3.10 The question in the Executive Summary highlights how the public service response is failing men because less than 1 in every 20 victims (4.4%) are being supported by a local domestic abuse service, only 2.5% of victims being classed as high risk are men, yet they make up a quarter of victims who report to the police and one in three of all victims. If the public service response was working, those men accessing local support services would be higher. (See *Annex 1: keys facts 1-7*).
- 3.11 It is true that for many men they will not actually want to use a public service to escape an abusive relationship, they will do so themselves or with the support of others (friends and family), but the charity believes that there needs to be a more equitable approach to funding, with some form of ring-fencing for male victims and it must be higher for all victims than it currently is.
- 3.12 Indeed research from 2020, across a sample of 27,876 clients (734 men and 27,142 women) upon exit from domestic abuse services, women were found to have significantly higher reported rates of improved quality of life and overall safety¹, it is acknowledged in both papers that the above may be a result of the fact that many of these services are specifically designed for women. This is why the Quality Standards for Services Supporting Male Victims/Survivors of Domestic Abuse that ManKind Initiative/Hestia Quality Standards created are so vital as a core benchmark for support that public services including domestic abuse commissioned services should adopt.

Training

- 3.13 The last area of concern is to question whether the general domestic abuse training that professionals receive in a range of public services (police, GPs, health service, social services etc.) is inclusive, does not minimise male victims and does not re-emphasise the gender stereotypes. The use of the contested non-inclusive “Duluth Model” is one example, that nearly all, if not all, case studies feature female victims or there is a footnote “we know it happens to men too but the majority of victims are female” and then the rest of the training focuses on female victims. This 20th century approach must change else male and LGBT+ victims will forever be marginalised and made invisible leading to less effective public service responses.
- 3.14 On this basis, we believe that within the VAWG Strategy:
- The Government must ensure all core domestic abuse training provided to professionals in public services such as the police, health service, local authorities, CPS and other public bodies is fully inclusive, does not minimise male victims, and complies with a refreshed Male Victims Statement/National Statement of Expectations. The Government must hold an independent review and not include public services themselves or their representative training arms/bodies that deliver or are involved in the training.

¹ Hine, B., Bates, E. A., Graham-Kevan, N., & Mackay, J. (2020). Comparing abuse profiles, contexts and outcomes of help-seeking heterosexual male and female victims of domestic violence: Part II – Exit from specialist services. *Manuscript submitted for publication in Partner Abuse*

- The Government must ensure all tools that are to be applied to victims of domestic abuse are fully inclusive and do not create any unequal situations or unintended consequences where a male victim is structurally at a disadvantage or has their level of risk downgraded because of their gender.
- The Government, in addition to the core training that professionals in public services receive are actively encouraged to take part in additional training on male victims to better understand the gender specific barriers they face and to overcome the gender stereotypes.
- We would encourage the Government to urge local public services to use the ManKind Initiative/Hestia Quality Standards for Services Supporting Male Victims/Survivors of Domestic Abuse as the benchmark for support they should adopt.

3.15 A number of real life examples are included in Annex 3 which show the need for gender-informed training and better responses.

4. Policy Change 4: Funding for male survivor services to be increased.

- 4.1 The charity believes that to ensure more men use commissioned community services and are able to escape from domestic abuse there is a need to increase domestic abuse funding, but with a clear expectation, stipulation and transparency that there is funding available and to be allocated for male victims. This could be through ring-fencing and/or transparent reporting and there must be more accountability.
- 4.2 The reason for this is that given the financial constraints that commissioners and commissioned services are under, their ability to provide gender-informed services for men is hampered. This means there is currently a lack of assigned staff (with male victim training), lack of specific communications (website area or a specific male-friendly named service) and not always having a proactive approach to attracting referrals or self-referrals.
- 4.3 In commissioned services it must be clearer through the commissioning process including in the tender specifications that a proportion of the funding must be assigned to male victims. It does not have to state exactly what that amount is but it must be transparent and there must be more accountability.
- 4.4 The charity's view and those portrayed during discussion with practitioners throughout the last year, including through the development of the National Service Standards, is that this competition for scarce resources can hamper the ability of local community commissioned services to better tailor their support in a gender-informed way. One effect, is that they do not have the staff numbers or the funding for communications to make their service more male-victim friendly. This has to change.
- 4.5 We believe that such a commitment and undertaking is vital in any future Male Victims Statement and National Statement of Expectations.
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5. Policy Area 5: Government moves away from gender comparisons and ensures equivalence.

- 5.1 One of the areas where the Government can lead the way in changing the narrative and ending gender stereotypes on domestic abuse is to limit, if not eliminate, how it compares domestic abuse between genders. It should instead compare the experiences and percentages of victims within genders. This will also support the culture change that is sorely needed.
- 5.2 The continual comparison of male and female victims can have the effect of minimising male victims and reinforcing gender stereotypes. This is important with respect to the psychology of communications where the impact is to further emphasise the majority and minimise the minority in the minds of victims, society, media, politicians and public services.
- 5.3 This can be seen in the statement below which is in the draft Statutory Guidance (published July 2020). Its impact on the users of the Guidance is to effectively trivialise or minimise male victims to the point that they are such a minority they should not really be focussed upon at all. We accept this is not the Government's intention, but the impact is to make male victims invisible which leads to the reinforcement of cultural bias and lack of professional/societal curiosity.

Paragraph 14: Domestic abuse is both a cause and consequence of gender inequality, with women disproportionately the victims. Women are more likely to experience repeat victimisation, be physically injured or killed as result of domestic abuse and experience non-physical abuse (including emotional and financial abuse), than men. In 2018-19, 92% of defendants in domestic abuse cases referred to the CPS were male and 83% of the victims were female (where sex of the defendant or victim was recorded).

- 5.4 It is better therefore to compare the volumes and experiences between victims/survivors and non-victims/survivors within genders to avoid this.

Ensuring Equivalence

- 5.5 In addition, the Government in any policy, announcements, models, case studies and guidance should always seek equivalence. That is, where a description or example of domestic abuse refers to aspects affecting female victims, then an equivalent example is used for male and LGBT+ victims.
- 5.6 This is an issue that we have raised in our response to the Statutory Guidance consultation, where examples of women as victims with accompanying models and research are used throughout which is positive. But the equivalent is not there for male victims.
- 5.7 The lack of equivalence when discussing domestic abuse reinforces the minimisation, invisibility and gender stereotypes around domestic abuse which add an additional barrier for male victims.
- 5.8 We would therefore ask that the Government takes an equivalence approach to domestic abuse policy and communications.

Public Relations

- 5.9 One additional point is that it is vital that on all Government announcements with regard to domestic abuse, that it includes an organisation or survivor representing male victims. Too often there have been announcements from the Government on domestic abuse but the only questions included are from those organisations representing female victims. Again, this reinforces the narrative, invisibility and gender stereotypes.
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6. Policy Area 6: Ensuring accountability of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner with respect to recognising and including male victims.

- 6.1 We are supportive of the role of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner and are pleased that the current incumbent has pledged to support a refreshed Male Victims Statement.
- 6.2 Given the fact that the Commissioner roles are fixed-term on the refreshed VAWG strategy, where the responsibilities of the Commissioner are stated, it must be clear that on advisory boards and subgroups that there is a requirement for including organisations supporting male victims.
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7. Policy Area 7: Creating a national network of refuges and safe houses for male victims (and their children).

- 7.1 At present in the whole of the UK, there are only 39 organisations with 220 refuge/safe house spaces for male victims (only 48 are solely available for male victims, the other 172 are for either men or women). These are nearly always full. Our Male Domestic Abuse Network service provides weekly information on vacancies and on average only 3-4 organisations have vacancies available for men. (*See Annex 2: keys fact 20*)
- 7.2 There are also no male refuge/safe houses in London, Norfolk/Suffolk nor the Home Counties (the nearest to London is in Northamptonshire).
- 7.3 This a scandalous situation that puts men and any children they have at greater risk as they have fewer options for being able to leave an abusive relationship. Over the past years, and exacerbated by Covid-19, we have had male victims calls us who are sleeping rough on the streets, in parks, tents, garages, cars as well as sofa surfing. Many men will not leave because there is nowhere to go which increases their risk.
- 7.4 Crisis charity reported in 2014 (the only research on the matter) that 13% of men who were rough sleeping/homeless was due to violence/abuse from a partner (61% women). Published homeless figures (autumn 2019) state that 3,534 men were sleeping rough so the statistics suggest c460 would have been due to partner abuse. (*See Annex 2: keys fact 12*)
- 7.5 On some occasions, we have even been asked by a local council department (such as social services) for information on and support on finding a male victim a refuge or safe

house space. This is despite the fact that their own housing department has the legal responsibility to accommodate victims of domestic abuse.

- 7.6 The Government is aware of this situation and it has got to the point where more responsibility and action must be brought to bear on local authorities. The very welcome new duties being placed on local authorities with regard to better support for victims of domestic abuse in accommodation will not support men if they are not in refuges/safehouses in the first place because they are not available, safe or are inappropriate.
 - 7.7 This of course does not just impact male victims of domestic abuse. It also affects many men who are victims of forced marriage, sexual violence and so-called “honour” based violence.
 - 7.8 We seek therefore that the VAWG Strategy, the refreshed Male Victims Statement and also National Statement of Expectations clearly states that this form of accommodation must be made available to male victims and their children and it is the duty of local authorities to ensure this happens. Too many do not want to take action, so the Government should impose upon them to do and lead the way in creating a national network of refuges and safe houses for male victims and their children.
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8. Policy Change 8: Commitment to review and reform the legal definition of rape to include male victims who are raped by women.

- 8.1 In British law, the treatment of male victims of rape is different depending on the gender of the perpetrator with a harsher law being applied to male perpetrators than female perpetrators. We believe there should be equality in law so that section 1 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003, should include cases where women force men or other women to engage in non-consensual intercourse (these cases are currently criminalised under section 4 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003, a less serious offence).
 - 8.2 For the impact on male victims of rape and sexual assault in the context of female intimate partners, the research conducted by Dr Siobhan Weare shows that many do not report this crime because they fear they will not be believed and also from a legal perspective they cannot be classed as a victim of rape which minimises their experiences.
 - 8.3 We therefore believe the VAWG Strategy must include a commitment from the Government to reform the law on rape to extend the law as set out in paragraph 8.1
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9. Policy Area 9: Creating proactive national and local awareness campaigns specifically targeted at male and LGBTQ+ victims.

- 9.1 To create the culture change, awareness of support and encourage leaving the abusive relationship, specifically targeted campaigns are vital.
- 9.2 As the ONS figures show (reference), only half (51%) of men tell anyone they are a victim of domestic abuse. Experience from our helpline and from practitioners in community services

also shows that men do not recognise they are a victim, fear not being believed and do not know where to turn. (See Annex 2: key fact 14)

- 9.3 We believe that as well as the Government making clear in any National Statement of Expectations that local authorities/Police and Crime Commissioners should launch gender-specific awareness campaigns to encourage male victims to come forward, it should create a national campaign. The charity, led by a professional communications expert, would be able to help and can work with the Government, survivors and practitioners on creating such targeted campaigns.

10. Policy Change 10: Improving support for female perpetrators of domestic abuse.

- 10.1 There are currently on average 5,000 women convicted of domestic abuse offences, but very little in terms of recognition let alone delivery of support. (See Annex 2: key fact 20)
- 10.2 The concern is that there are very limited programmes to support and rehabilitate them. Cafcass itself has admitted that it would like to use courses and programmes for female perpetrators but there are none to commission at the scale they require.
- 10.3 This is an important issue for those women themselves and also for any future partners they may have, if they have committed such offences but have not had the opportunity for rehabilitation. This is a public safety issue and gap that requires addressing.
- 10.4 The VAWG Strategy and any future Government backed perpetrator strategy therefore has to include measures and programmes to support and rehabilitate female perpetrators of domestic abuse.

Annex 1: Policy Requests within a refreshed Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy

Below is a list of the policy requests from the evidence and information that we have supplied.

- 1) We propose that there should be parallel strategy to the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy (which we support) with an interim/transitional position of a refreshed [Male Victims Statement](#) and [National Statement of Expectations](#) for local areas.
- 2) We welcome and support the submission from the Men and Boys Coalition on the parallel strategy (see 1) and also the letter from the Stand With Him women's group of women who call for the same.
- 3) The Government and public bodies must lead by example in changing the culture and gender stereotypes regarding male victims of domestic abuse.

- 4) Improve public sector response towards male victims.
- 5) The Government moves away from statistical comparisons between genders and ensures equivalence in its reporting, models and communications.
- 6) Ensure domestic abuse training given to public services is fully inclusive and is independently reviewed and not by public service training providers to avoid conflicts of interest (“marking their own homework”).
- 7) Funding for domestic abuse services is increased and there is greater clarity/transparency on how much is on how much is allocated for male victims. This could be through ring-fencing and/or transparent reporting.
- 8) Greater accountability on the Domestic Abuse Commissioner with respect to recognising and including male victims.
- 9) The creation of a national network of refuges and safe houses for male victims (and their children).
- 10) Review and reform the legal definition of rape to include male and female victims who are raped by women.
- 11) The creation of proactive national and local awareness campaigns specifically targeted at male and LGBTQ+ victims.
- 12) Improvement in the support for female perpetrators of domestic abuse.
- 13) The Government must ensure all tools that are to be applied to victims of domestic abuse are fully inclusive and do not create any unequal situations or unintended consequences where a male victim is structurally at a disadvantage or has their level of risk downgraded because of their gender.
- 14) We would encourage the Government to urge local public services to use the ManKind Initiative/Hestia Quality Standards for Services Supporting Male Victims/Survivors of Domestic Abuse as the benchmark for support they should adopt.

Annex 2: Key Statistics on Male and LGBT+ Victims of Domestic Abuse

Volume of Male Victims and Service Access

- 1) The Office for National Statistics figures show² every year that one in the three victims of domestic abuse are male equating to 757,000 men (1.561m women). This is for 2019/20
- 2) One in 6-7 men and one in 4 women will be victims of domestic abuse in their lifetime³.
- 3) Of domestic abuse crimes recorded by the police, 26% were committed against men⁴ in 2019/20. This equates to c155,000 offences per year.

² Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2020 - <https://bit.ly/2WQ4JZ8> (Table 2)

³ Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2020 - <https://bit.ly/2WQ4JZ8> (Table 1)

⁴ Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2020 - <https://bit.ly/2WQ4JZ8> (Tables 11 and 16)

- 4) In 2018, 174,733 men reported to English and Welsh police forces stating they were a victim of domestic abuse as did 514,081 women. 25% of all victims who report to the police are male.⁵
- 5) Only 4.4% of victims of domestic abuse being supported by local domestic services are men⁶ according to SafeLives data (2019/20). This is just 132 from 3,000 people. This highlights how few men are being supported for local domestic abuse services
- 6) Only 2.5% of all clients who are assessed as being high risk are men, according to SafeLives data. This is just 858 from 34,815 clients between 2010 and 2017. This highlights how few men are being assessed and suggests whether the lower levels of risk and harm are applied when they are.⁷
- 7) Only 5.3% of cases discussed at multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) in 2019/20 were male victims.⁸
- 8) Across a sample of 27,876 clients (734 men and 27,142 women) upon exit from domestic abuse services, women were found to have significantly higher reported rates of improved quality of life and overall safety⁹. For this fact and fact (6), it is acknowledged in both papers that the above may be a result of the fact that many of these services are specifically designed for women.

Service Availability

- 9) Since Covid, the charity saw an increase of calls to its helpline by one quarter and visits to its website by 75%. Victims have reported being more isolated than ever, the intensity of the abuse (psychological and physical has increased), less able to leave because of lack of money (furlough and redundancy) and lockdown has been used an excuse for breaches in agreed child contact agreements.¹⁰
- 10) 59% of the men who call the ManKind Initiative helpline have never spoken to anyone before about the abuse they are suffering and 70% would not have called if the helpline was not anonymous.¹¹
- 11) Callers to the ManKind Initiative helpline state they are suffering from these forms of domestic abuse.¹²

Emotional/Psychological	95%
Physical	68%
Financial	23%
Sexual	3%
Coercive control	13%

- 12) There are only 39 organisations with 220 refuge/safe house spaces for male victims (only 48 are solely available for male victims, the other 172 are for either men or women).¹³
- 13) There are 220 services for male victims of domestic abuse in England and Wales which are primarily community-based commissioned services supporting female and male victims.¹⁴

⁵ FOI requests to 43 police forces conducted by the ManKind Initiative

⁶ Domestic abuse victim services, England and Wales: year ending March 2020 - <https://bit.ly/2Nf2bSx> (Table 13)

⁷ Hine, B., Bates, E. A., Mackay, J., & Graham-Kevan, N. (2020). Comparing abuse profiles, contexts and outcomes of help-seeking heterosexual male and female victims of domestic violence: Part I – Who presents to specialist services? Manuscript submitted for publication in *Partner Abuse*

⁸ Domestic abuse victim services, England and Wales: year ending March 2020 - <https://bit.ly/2Nf2bSx> (Table 16a)

⁹ Hine, B., Bates, E. A., Graham-Kevan, N., & Mackay, J. (2020). Comparing abuse profiles, contexts and outcomes of help-seeking heterosexual male and female victims of domestic violence: Part II – Exit from specialist services. *Manuscript submitted for publication in Partner Abuse*

¹⁰ ManKind Initiative helpline calls (March to September 2020)

¹¹ ManKind Initiative helpline calls (2018/19)

¹² ManKind Initiative helpline calls (2018/19)

¹³ Male Domestic Abuse Network (www.mdan.org.uk)

¹⁴ Domestic abuse victim services, England and Wales: year ending March 2020 - <https://bit.ly/2Nf2bSx> (Table 1a)

Male Victim Disclosure

- 14) Half of male victims (49%) fail to tell anyone they are a victim of domestic abuse and are two and a half times less likely to tell anyone than female victims (19%)¹⁵.
- 15) 11% of male victims (7.2% women) have considered taking their life due to partner abuse.¹⁶ The charity has seen an increase in calls regarding suicide ideation since the pandemic started.
- 16) 8.3% of men (16.9% of women) have been victims of “force” through domestic abuse¹⁷.
- 17) Less than 2% of men who are victims of partner abuse state that it is a man who has carried out the abuse¹⁸.
- 18) Over a three year period (April 2016 to Mar 2019), 88 men were killed in domestic homicides (38 by a partner or ex-partner) by a partner or ex-partner (274 and 222 women respectively)¹⁹.
- 19) The percentage of gay men (6.0%) or bi-sexual men (7.3%) who suffered domestic abuse in 2019/20 is more than for heterosexual men (3.5%). Lesbian women (12.2%) and bisexual women (19.6%) as a percentage are more likely to be a victim of domestic abuse compared to heterosexual women (6.9%)²⁰.

Other Facts

- 20) Between 2016/17 and 2018/19, an average of 5,000 women per year were prosecuted for domestic abuse.²¹
- 21) In 2018, 4,903 men took their own lives (13 per day) which equated to three in every four suicides.²²
- 22) 85% of those who slept rough in 2019 are male (where gender known).²³

Annex 3: 15 examples of how gender stereotypes affect male victims

- 1) *“Mr Anderson explained he didn’t really want to report that incident at the time because he felt embarrassed about having to explain what was going on. He said he didn’t think men suffered from domestic violence”* (Metro, 20 December 2016).
- 2) *“When James attended MRI with a police officer for treatment of the stab wound, he was not asked any questions by attending professionals in relation to domestic abuse. There was no targeted enquiry and no apparent consideration that James may have been a victim of domestic abuse.”* (Taken from the DHR of “James” who was fatally stabbed)²⁴.
- 3) *“...the fact that Mr D was not regarded as the victim, despite third party reports, did not enable conversations and appropriate risk assessments to be undertaken with him. The Panel also felt that because he was a male there was an assumption made that he was the perpetrator of abuse for the domestic incidents reported to the police, therefore summarising that gender stereotypes were most probably at play during this time.”* (Taken from the DHR of “Mr D” who died by suicide)²⁵.

¹⁵ Partner abuse in detail, England and Wales: year ending March 2018: Report - <https://bit.ly/38epe4X>

¹⁶ Partner abuse in detail, England and Wales: year ending March 2018: Report - <https://bit.ly/38epe4X> and Data - <https://bit.ly/38faSRL>

¹⁷ Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2020 - <https://bit.ly/2WQ4JZ8> (Table 1)

¹⁸ Partner abuse in detail, year ending March 2018 – <https://bit.ly/2KLW8UO> (Table 2)

¹⁹ Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2020 - <https://bit.ly/2WQ4JZ8> (Table 23)

²⁰ Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2020 - <https://bit.ly/2WQ4JZ8> (Table 6)

²¹ Page 47 CPS VAWG Report (18-19) <https://bit.ly/2QjTqy5>

²² ONS: Suicides in the UK: 2018 registrations

²³ MHCLG: Rough sleeping snapshot in England: autumn 2019

²⁴ DHR “James”: <https://www.mankind.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/DHR2-James.pdf>

²⁵ DHR Mr D – <https://www.mankind.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/DHR2-Mr-D.pdf>

- 4) *“Respondents [local magistrates] were asked about their perception of the risk and harm that might be faced by a survivor if they were in a range of couple relationships. Responses indicated that most magistrates were influenced by the public story of Domestic Abuse and the accompanying gendered assumptions. The majority of magistrates responding to the question perceived that the most risk and harm would be experienced by women when they were faced with violence from men.”* (“The Training Needs of Magistrates in relation to Domestic Abuse”, Magistrates Association).
- 5) *“A barman has spoken out about the horrific abuse he suffered at the hands of ex-fiancée which ended in her stabbing him 28 times. Martyn Brown admitted he was ‘ashamed to tell anyone what was happening’ even keeping the truth about Harriet Sharp’s behaviour from his own family”* (Daily Mirror, 2016).
- 6) *“All of the help locally is geared up for females, with no provision for males. They made an exception for me, but I was seen as a novelty, the support worker kept telling me how she and her colleagues would discuss me in my absence.”*²⁶ (Survivor, UCLAN research into male victims of coercive control, 2020)
- 7) *“The resources I was signposted were very much slanted as though men were always the abuser, women the victim. One resource I tried to access online soon after emotional abuse gave me two options to choose from”:*
 - *“I am a woman, and I am being abused by my partner”*
 - *“I am a man, and I am afraid I am abusing my partner”*²⁷
- 8) In discussions with the ManKind Initiative and Lancashire Police five years ago, their central teams who collate all of their DASH Risk Assessments were sending a number back to police officers. This was because they felt they were underestimating the level of risk and harm men were facing based on the written comments of the behaviours in the assessment.
- 9) A Bromley Council service specification stated in 2017 and 2019 *“Domestic Violence and Violence against Women and Girls Service”* stated that it was looking for a service to support *“Standard, Medium and High level support to Females”* while asking for a service *“An appropriate service for male victims and relevant signposting when necessary”*. There should be no difference and the council defended this specification when challenged.
- 10) A helpline caller example *“A male victim was physically assaulted in his own home. When police responded, they arrested his female partner, woke the small children and took them off with her in the police car. Later that night they were delivered to one of her family members and returned home to their father the following day.”* (caller to the helpline in 2020)
- 11) *“I have guys that call me and say ‘I can’t be a victim of domestic abuse. How would I be a victim I am a police officer, I’m a judge, I’m a solicitor, I work in the field, I can’t be a victim.’ Even though they know what is going on it’s like ‘I can’t talk to anyone, I can’t talk to anyone local’ they say ‘I can’t engage with the service.’”* (Hines, Bates and Wallace (2020) in their study working with call handlers of a male victim’s helpline)²⁸
- 12) *“I reported her to the Police on one occasion and was asked what I had done to deserve the beating, I told them I had done nothing at all, to which they told me that was unlikely and it was probably something I had done or said.”* (see Bates, 2020, p6)²⁹
- 13) *“I was transferred to a bigger hospital after my first week of stabbing recovery. Straight back into the ICU. A young doctor ask me as they wheeled me in ‘So tell me, did you deserve it or is she just a crazy bitch?’”* (see Bates, 2020, p6)

²⁶ Male Victims of Coercive Control, Powney, Graham-Kevan & Willan 2020/21, UCLan.

²⁷ Male Victims of Coercive Control: Powney, Graham-Kevan & Willan 2020/21, UCLan

²⁸ “I Have Guys Call Me and Say ‘I Can’t Be the Victim of Domestic Abuse’”: Exploring the Experiences of Telephone Support Providers for Male Victims of Domestic Violence and Abuse (Ben Hlne, Elizabeth Bates, Sarah Wallace)

²⁹ Bates, E. A. (2020). “No one would ever believe me”: An exploration of the impact of intimate partner violence victimization on men. *Psychology of Men & Masculinities*, 21(4), 497–507. <https://doi.org/10.1037/men0000206>

- 14) *“My brother was a victim of domestic abuse and was never taken seriously- particularly in his work environment. This had a massive impact on his mental wellbeing and continues to take a toll.” (sister of a male victim)*
- 15) #ViolenceisViolence video (role reversal public experiment video – health warning of swearing): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u3PgH86OyEM>

ENDS