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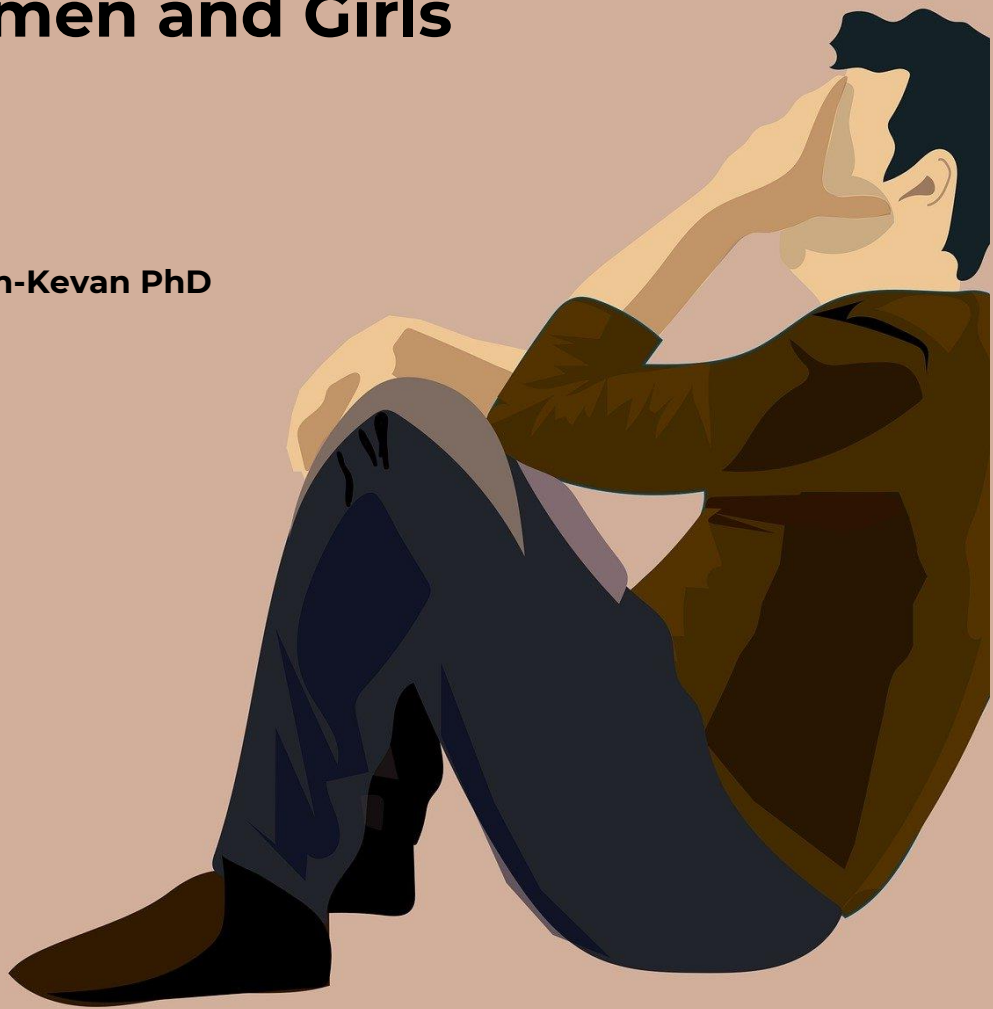
# **The Survivorship Experiences of Men and Boys of Crimes Categorised as Crimes of Violence Against Women and Girls**


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## Foreword

The time has come for change. It is time the voices of male survivors are heard. Really heard. And are valued on their own terms, in their own language and in their own identity.

Over the past two decades, there has been a growing number of male survivors reaching out for help - whether to friends, families, work colleagues and public services such as the police, councils (including their commissioned services) and health services.

In the light of horrific revelations of sexual abuse in religious, sporting and social care contexts and the appalling crimes of serial offenders Reynhard Sinaga and Stephen Port, male victims of domestic abuse are bravely coming forward to speak about their experiences in the media. But this is just tip of the iceberg. We know there are far more who are not coming forward.

There has also been a growing number of brilliant 'by and for' grass roots organisations for male survivors. These predominantly have been created due to the lived experience of their founders and the vacuum of services that were tailored to them or their family members when they need them most. Some general services have taken a welcome and more gender-informed sensitive approach by broadening their branding, services and given staff specialist roles in supporting male clients. There is more academic interest and research too.

But this is just the tip of the iceberg - there needs to be far, far more. We know that when the support is there, men will come forward. Yet, time and again, male survivors are telling us they feel invisible. Both at the time and also when they were trying to rebuild their lives. They say society does not recognise what they are going through or had gone through, nor do friends, family, work colleagues or public professionals. There was not enough personal or professional curiosity. Society did not know it actually even

happened to men. Many male survivors say themselves they didn't know it affected men either. Those that did, felt shame because society had brought them up to feel shameful because it meant they were not a real man. They say there was little help or they did not know there was help even where it exists. There were no visible and constant campaigns - they never heard the media, public bodies or politicians talk about it.

Given invisibility is a key and constant barrier for male victims and survivors, it was important to conduct research on the impact on male survivors of being classified and called victims of violence against women and girls. This is Government policy. It flows through their national strategies and communications, impacting on regional and local strategies, communications and in the end it affects the narrative, the service delivery, the public's consciousness and all society. It affects how male survivors are viewed, recognised and supported - and how they view themselves. The Government did produce an updated Male Position Statement in 2021 but this did not take into account the vast majority of recommendations and views of organisations and survivors. It is barely mentioned at all by the Government or more localised public bodies. It has the same invisibility as the male survivors themselves.

The voices of male survivors show there is a clear case for reform. To be visible in their own right, as men and boys. Not to be seen anymore as second-class victims. To be seen in a way that does not affect the support and recognition of female victims.

The call is for an Intimate Violence Against Men and Boys Strategy. To make the invisible, visible. To make the excluded, included. To make the silenced, heard. Surely that should not be too much to ask for. It is at the very heart of a decent, fair and truly inclusive country.

**Mark Brooks OBE**

# Acknowledgments

We would firstly like to thank the male survivors who took part in the focus group discussions, and the male survivors, female survivors, friends and family members who completed the questionnaire.

We would like to acknowledge the following organisations who collaborated with us on this report for their support in organising and facilitating focus groups.

Dads Unlimited

HARM Network

Men and Boys Coalition

Paul Lavelle Foundation

Survivors West Yorkshire

We Are Survivors

We would also like to thank those organisations and individuals who distributed the survey questionnaire.

## Disclaimer

The views in this report are the views of the authors, and are not necessarily or automatically the views of the above.

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## Executive Summary

- Consultations were held with Mark Brooks OBE - ManKind Initiative and Duncan Craig OBE - We Are Survivors, Ally Fogg, - Chair of the Men and Boys Coalition, Dr Maz Idriss, Gay Larter - Director of Domestic Abuse Services, Dads Unlimited/Save Dave, Paul Gladwell - Trustee Paul Lavelle Foundation, Rob Balfour - CEO, Survivors West Yorkshire.
- Following these consultations four focus groups were held with male survivors of sexual abuse and violence and/or domestic abuse and violence.
- Due to a failure to recruit male survivors of honour related abuse, consultations were held with Dr Roxanne Khan, Director of Honour Abuse Research Matrix (HARM) and Dr Maz Idriss of the Elm Foundation and Manchester Metropolitan University.
- Based on feedback from the focus groups, a survey was launched to explore the perspectives of male survivors of abuse currently classified as violence against women and girls and other third-party perspectives.
- In total, 369 responses were collected between 15 June 2023 and 17 August 2023 (342 male survivors, 3 female survivors, 16 family member, partner, or friend of male survivor, and 8 'other' which included individuals who work with both male and female survivors and an independent domestic violence adviser (IDVA)). This is a relatively small sample size, however power calculations and the sheer size of the effect found we can have some confidence in the findings.
- Overall, male survivors reported feeling a range of negative emotions including confused, ignored, excluded and retraumatised.
- Continuing to classify male survivors as being victims of violence against women and girls and falling under the VAWG strategy was overwhelmingly rejected by both survivors and those that support them. However, given the small sample size future research should be commissioned so that a larger and more representative sample can be collected.

- The clear preference was for a new gender-neutral interpersonal violence strategy to replace the current VAWG strategy. There was also support for separate male and female strategies.

#### A Note on Terminology

Throughout this report, both male and female victims of violence and abuse will be referred to as survivors. Through extensive consultations with male survivors and organisations, the descriptor 'survivor' was the preferred terminology.

# Introduction

The term violence against women and girls (VAWG) is an internationally recognised term and is defined by the United Nations as *“any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women and girls, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. Violence against women and girls encompasses, but is not limited to, physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family or within the general community, and perpetrated or condoned by the State”* [1].

In July 2021 the UK Government launched the ‘Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls’ (VAWG) strategy which defined VAWG as *“acts of violence or abuse that we know disproportionately affect women and girls. Crimes and behaviour covered by this term include rape and other sexual offences, domestic abuse, stalking, ‘honour’-based abuse (including female genital mutilation forced marriage, and ‘honour’ killings), as well as many others, including offences committed online. While we use the term ‘violence against women and girls’, throughout this Strategy, this refers to all survivors of any of these offences.”* [2]. The introduction of this strategy, alongside those launched in 2010, 2016 and 2019 aimed to:

- increase support for survivors;
- increase the number of perpetrators brought to justice;
- increase reporting to police;
- increase survivor engagement with police and wider public service response;
- reduce the prevalence of violence against women and girls.

Within both the United Nations’ definition of violence against women and girls and the VAWG strategy men are also noted as being a potential victim of these offences. The VAWG strategy states that the authors *“recognise*

*that men and boys are also affected by these crimes” [2] and in March 2022 the UK Government issued a “position statement on male survivors of crimes considered in the cross-government Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy and the Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan” [3], which was proposed to sit alongside the VAWG strategy, however, to date, it has not been referenced alongside it. Conceptualising male or non-binary individuals subjected to domestic, sexual or honour related abuse, stalking or exploitation as being survivors of VAWG is counterintuitive and has the potential to detrimentally impact non-female survivors. To date, however, no research has been commissioned to explore the impact this has on the experiences of non-female survivors. The current research aimed to explore the perceptions of male survivors of crimes categorised within the VAWG strategy.*

## **Background**

As the VAWG strategy refers broadly to a range of acts of violence and abuse, the current research explored the experiences of male survivors of the following types of violence and abuse:

- **Domestic abuse** – *“abusive behaviour of one person aged 16 and over towards another person aged 16 or over who are personally connected. Behaviour is classed as abusive if it consists of physical or sexual abuse; violent or threatening behaviour; controlling or coercive behaviour; economic abuse - behaviour that effects an individual’s ability to: acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or obtain goods or services; and psychological, emotional or other abuse. This may include abusive behaviour directed at another person (for example, the child of one of the people involved)” [4].*
- **Sexual violence** – *“rape, sexual coercion, sexual abuse, and or exploitation of adults or children” [5].*

- **Forced marriage** – “where one or both individuals do not consent to marriage resulting in pressure and/or abuse being used to force one or both individuals into the marriage” [6].
- **Honour-based abuse** – “a crime or incident committed to protect or defend the 'honour' of a family or community” [6].
- **Stalking including (cyberstalking)** – “where an individual engages in behaviours such as harassment; following another individual; contacting, or attempting to contact, a person by any means; publishing any statement or other material relating or purporting to relate to a person, or purporting to originate from a person; monitoring the use by a person of the internet, email or any other form of electronic communication; loitering in any place (whether public or private); interfering with any property in the possession of a person, or watching or spying on a person” [7].
- **Revenge porn, intimate image abuse and sextortion** – “where another threatens to, or actually, non-consensually distributes of explicit images of another, or creates a false/digitally altered sexually explicit image of another with the intent to cause the person depicted distress” [8].

Classifying all survivors of these offences as experiencing a crime against women and girls has the potential to lead to unanticipated negative outcomes for those survivors who are not female. Indirect evidence for this can be found by comparing the findings from the peer-reviewed research literature, self-reported victimisation in crime surveys and police recorded offences. For example, within the context of domestic abuse, peer-reviewed literature consistently finds males and females to be similarly likely to be subject to physical assaults from a partner e.g. [9, 10], however crime surveys consistently find higher prevalence for females, for example data drawn from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) ending March 2022 suggests that 3.0% men and 6.9% of women aged 16 or over experienced domestic abuse between March 2021-2022 [11]. This disparity suggests that

males do not recognise their victimisation experiences as 'domestic abuse' likely due at least in part to the lack of awareness generally of male domestic abuse victimisation, this is consistent with earlier research by Milalic and Elliot [12]. Indeed, in Moffitt et al.'s, (2002) [13] longitudinal cohort study they asked their male and female participants about their experiences of acts of aggression at the hands of their intimate partner and found that when this was framed within a crime context, males were far less likely to disclose their victimisation, compared to when it was framed within a relationship context. The disparity between empirical research derived rates and police recorded rates is even more stark. Here, of crimes recorded by police, the victim was female in 74.1% of domestic-abuse related offences [11]. The CSEW cautions that *'police recorded crime excludes offences that are not reported to, or not recorded by, the police.'* The reasons that these offences are less likely to be reported and recorded than offences against females, is likely to be multifaceted. However, invisibility brought about due to the lack of awareness of males' experiences of abuse victimisation would make it less likely that males would call the police and also less likely that others would do so on their behalf. Other types of crimes currently classified as VAWG are similarly also experienced by males with recent CSEW rates of 1.2% men and 3.3% women aged 16 years and over reporting that they were survivors of sexual assault (including attempts) between March 2021-2022 [5]. Indeed, research from Wales ACEs survey found 7.6 % of boys and 11.7% of girls were victims of sexual abuse in childhood [13]. The CSEW 2022 found that 3.3% of victims were female and 1.2% male.

Although men can and do experience honour abuse through forced marriage or because of their sexuality or 'Westernized' behaviour, this has been largely ignored by both academics and policy makers. It is likely that this is at least partly due to these offences being classified as VAWG, in that this may have obscured males who were harmed by these practices. The UK Government's Forced Marriage Unit (FMU, Home Office) has consistently (2018-2022) reported that approximately 20% of their caseload are males. As

Idriss (2022) [16] argues this proportion is likely to be an underestimate due to the general lack of awareness of male victims of honour-related abuse. Analysis of case files of male victims of honour related abuse also found that although half of abuse against male victims was by males, females were collaborators or primary perpetrators in the other half of cases, consistent with other research from the UK [17] and internationally [18]. In terms of frequency of honour related offences recorded in the CSEW although these are recorded by police, the sex of the victim and perpetrator/s is not included [11]. Whilst the statistics show a higher proportion of survivors VAWG offences were female, it also shows that men are also survivors of such offences.

The CSEW notes that *“police recorded crime excludes offences that are not reported to, or not recorded by, the police. Trends can be influenced by changes in recording practices, or police activity and public reporting of crime, making it difficult to make long-term comparisons. There are also concerns about the quality of recording and that crime is not recorded consistently across police forces.”*

In relation to VAWG strategy and its discrimination against male survivors, it seems likely that the prevalence of men who experience violence and abuse will be underreported, hence not accurately represented in the national statistics. The classification of men as survivors of ‘violence against women and girls’ has the potential to negatively impact awareness of male survivors by the police and other support services; and male survivors not recognising their own experiences as abusive and a criminal offence which would impact help-seeking and reporting. In a report by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner in 2022, 82% men told the Commissioner that accessing help was “quite or very difficult”, compared to 43% of women and 73% of non-binary people [11]. The classification of males under the VAWG strategy banner may lead to a lack of funding for support services,

awareness and prevention initiatives, and vulnerability to being labelled a 'perpetrator' by police and other services.

The current report summarises the findings from a recent study exploring the lived experience of male survivors of crimes classified as VAWG. It sought to explore the impacts, if any, on males who had been subjected to crimes classed as VAWG. To explore this further, this report summarises the views of male survivors themselves, female survivors and those that support them.

Following consultation with support agencies and taking in the views of the then Victim Commissioner Dame Vera Baird (2020/21) this study also explored whether the current VAWG strategy banner was appropriate, and if not, whether there should be a separate strategy for intimate violence against men and boys or a gender inclusive strategy that clearly covered both male and female survivors.

# Aims and Objectives

Extending existing related research activity to explore the perceived impact of classifying and defining male survivors as being survivors of VAWG in terms of the impact on:

1. the likelihood of recognition of personal victimhood;
2. beliefs about self after victimisation;
3. the likelihood of seeking support;
4. experiences of seeking support;
5. the likelihood of reporting the offence/s to police.

This research further explores whether survivors and those who support them wish for a change in the current categorisation of crimes involving male survivors as being a victim of VAWG.

The current report:

1. Explores the views of male survivors and those that support them, to understand their lived experience of being the survivor of a crime categorized as VAWG, and whether male survivors believed being defined in this way exacerbated their survivor journey, and;
2. Provides evidence to aid policymakers in deciding the future of the inclusive VAWG strategy.

## Focus Groups

In order to develop appropriate survey questions, four semi-structured focus groups were conducted via Zoom and using a group schedule which was developed in collaboration with spokespeople from the leading male support organisations in England. The spokespeople were: Mark Brooks OBE - ManKind Initiative; Duncan Craig OBE - We Are Survivors; Ally Fogg, - Chair of the Men and Boys Coalition; Dr Maz Idriss – Trustee of the Elm Foundation; Gay Larter - Director of Domestic Abuse Services; Dads

Unlimited/Save Dave; Paul Gladwell - Trustee of the Paul Lavelle Foundation; Rob Balfour - CEO, Survivors West Yorkshire.

In total, 18 participants attended one of the four groups, with all participants being male survivors of sexual abuse, and/or domestic abuse who had been supported by the organisations listed above. A focus group with male survivors of honour-based abuse and violence was planned but did not go ahead, however, Dr Roxanne Khan, Director of Honour Abuse Research Matrix (HARM) and Dr Maz Idriss were consulted to inform the follow-on survey questions.

### **Questionnaire**

Findings from the focus groups were used to develop a mixed method questionnaire which explored the impact of survivorship experiences of men and boys victimised by crimes currently included in the VAWG strategy. The questionnaire was distributed via Qualtrics using a link and shared by collaborating organisations and their networks.

In total 369 responses were received between 15 June 2023 and 17 August 2023 (342 male survivors, 3 female survivors, 16 family members, partner, or friend of male survivor, and 8 'other' which included individuals who work with both male and female survivors and an independent domestic violence adviser (IDVA)), these latter respondents were termed *third-party perspectives* in this report. As indicated by the Qualtrics sample size calculator [19], an ideal sample size based on the population of males in the UK (32.9 million) would be 385 (Qualtrics 2023), therefore a sample size of 369 would be representative of the target group. Male survivors were aged between 18-68, third-party respondents were aged between 24-65.

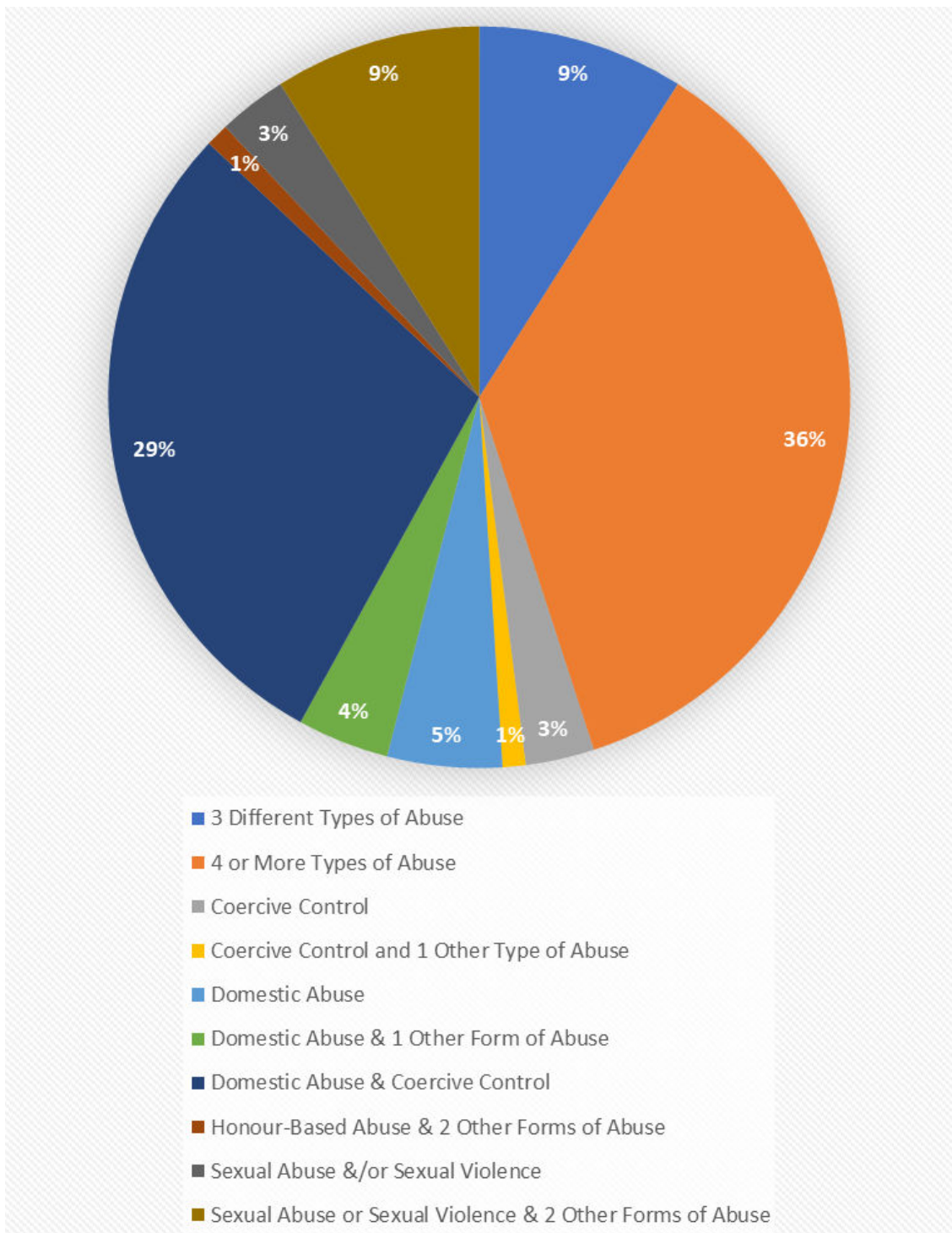
# Findings

Recruitment of participants only resulted in 369 the respondents and so the results should be seen as suggestive rather than compelling.

## **Patterns of Abuse**

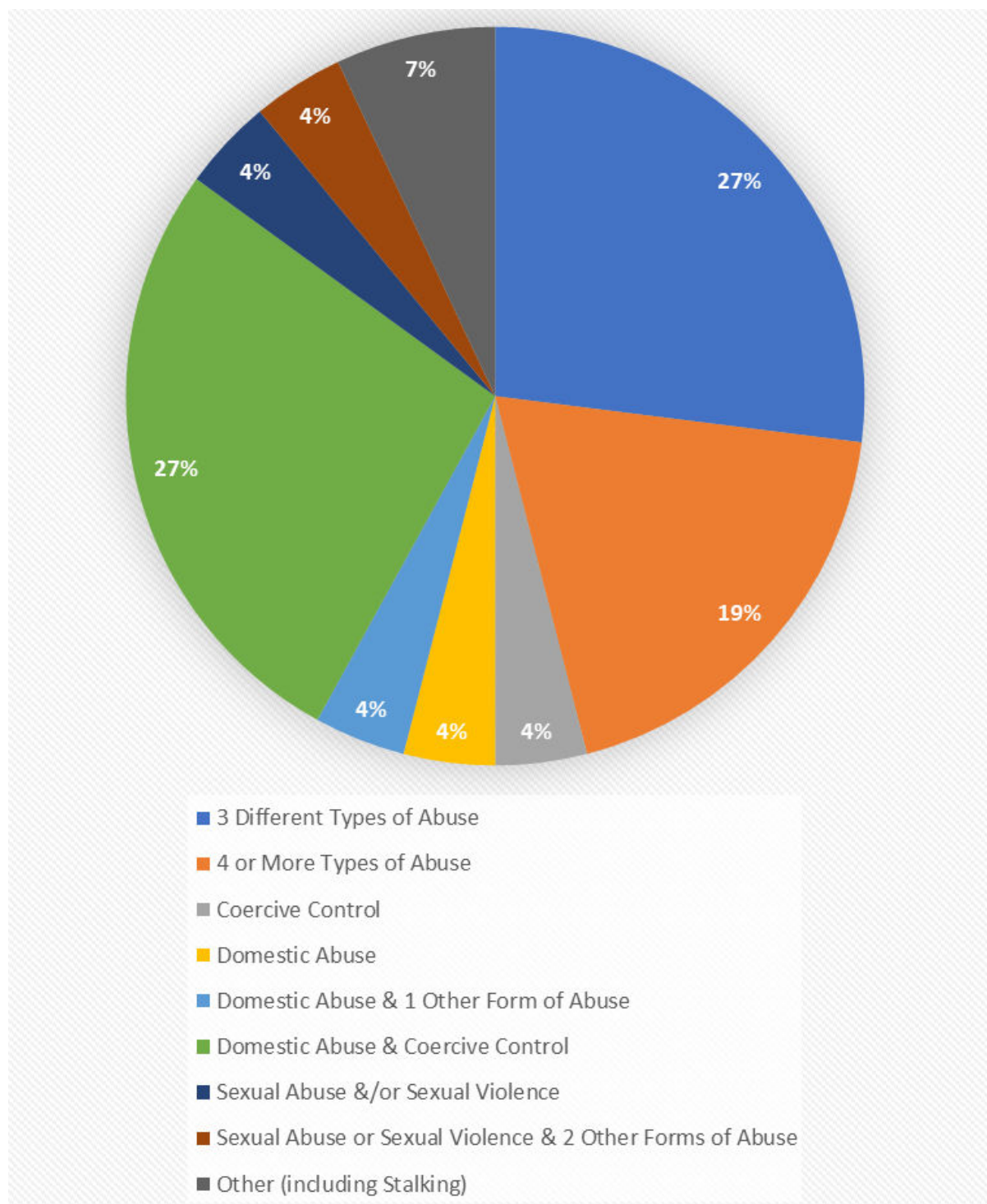
Below are the relative proportions of the different types of abuse reported by the participants (for data summaries including number of unknown cases see Appendix 1) see Figure 1 for male survivors and Figure 2 for third party perspectives. From both perspectives domestic abuse was the most common, followed by sexual abuse, however, 36% of male survivors and 18% of third-party perspectives indicated that four or more types of abuse and violence were experienced.

Figure 1: Male Survivors' Experiences of Abuse.



Most respondents reported more than one type of abuse experience, which was consistent with the third-party perspectives (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Male Survivors' Experiences of Abuse – Third Party Perspectives.



## Recognising behaviour as abusive

In terms of the time taken to recognise their experiences as abusive, a quarter of male survivors (23.7%) and over a tenth of third parties (14.8%) reported that it took between 1-4 years. However, a fifth of male survivors (MS) reported that it took between 5-8 years. Qualitative responses suggested that one of the main barriers to identifying experiences as abusive, was a lack of awareness that men could experience these types of violence and abuse, as shown in the quotes below.

This lack of awareness can stem from beliefs and stereotypes around 'normal' maleness:

*MS57: "Being male, I was told that abuse doesn't happen to me, that I liked any sexual touch, that I asked for it, that I wanted it (even male children get told this). Having revenge porn hit the headlines years later as new laws were made about it made me realise I suffered that too. Even though of course the news outlets focussed solely on female victims."*

And stereotypes of passive femininity and male chivalry:

*MS43: "Brought up to not consider women in the realms of violence. They were to be protected. I was taught to recognise and how to deal with aggressive and violent men, I was never shown what to do with aggressive women. That and I didn't believe it until friends staged an intervention."*

For other participants awareness was not sufficient to translate into support. This included a lack of responses from agencies:

*MS2: "I had told social services at the time and nothing happened to the man, so I assumed that it was normal or at least not a big deal. It wasn't until years later when I told a friend about what had happened that I realised it was rape, and I was a victim of sexual abuse."*

It also included interpersonal situations that are not unique to men that made it difficult to seek help:

MS89: *“Eldest in the family and family honour forced me to keep things to myself and not to seek any help. It's been a toxic relationship from very beginning. But, due to family honour and community I tried to ride it out and make it work.”*

Other barriers included feelings of shame due to occupational status:

MS44: *“I felt ashamed to admit this as I work in policing. I also knew due to my experiences in work that there was no support for men in my force area”*

Or family reputation:

MS130: *“Shame and denial that my family would do that to me”*

Participants also spoke of minimising the culpability of the perpetrator:

MS134: *“Being in love and excusing her behaviour, thinking it was something else causing her behaviour”*

Or the perpetrator minimising their own culpability:

MS131: *“Partner dismissed her abuse as normal and made me feel like I was blowing it out of proportion.”*

As mentioned in two of the quotes, support from friends was seen to be very important in terms of recognising experiences as abusive. The data clearly showed the majority of male survivors themselves tried to seek support following these experiences (73.7%), however, third party perspectives suggested male survivors did not often seek support following these experiences (74.1%) implying support for male survivors lacks visibility.

In terms of what support was wanted by male survivors, counselling, police, and legal support were the main forms identified in this survey.

MS152: *“I was considering taking my own life and needed to know that I actually was worth saving.”*

MS122: *“Someone to believe me.”*

MS135: *“Expert advice on what to do, including the support of the police.”*

MS206: *“Advice, financial support with solicitors/barristers.”*

When asked what support was offered, some participants referred to short counselling interventions – both private and NHS-, online peer support, helplines, webpages, and medication. However, an overwhelming number of responses reflected that no support was offered and when it was, it was very difficult to access.

MS52: *“Counselling (however it took me moving to a different area to access).”*

MS36: *“Struggled to find anything for years. All literature seemed to be aimed at women who had been raped or assaulted by men. It was like the idea of a woman raping or assaulting a man was not possible.”*

MS161: *“I was disbelieved, told I could not be supported as a man and given the name of a private solicitor’s office (which was shut).”*

MS167: *“Found a survivor group by chance and they saved my life – I realised it wasn’t just me.”*

MS174: *“Doctors provided sleeping medication, but besides that no other support was given.”*

In terms of ease of accessing support, the majority of male survivors did not feel this was easy (59.9%), did not know where/how to access support (50.6%), and felt this took a long time (52.9%). These findings were generally mirrored in the responses from third-party perspectives, with the only difference being in terms of whether male survivors found accessing support easy, to which 96.2% of third-party respondents answered ‘Yes’. This suggests there may be misconceptions around how easy it is for male survivors to access appropriate support following their experiences. One of the biggest barriers for men who did not access support was that they did not know where to go for support, with other barriers including: worrying

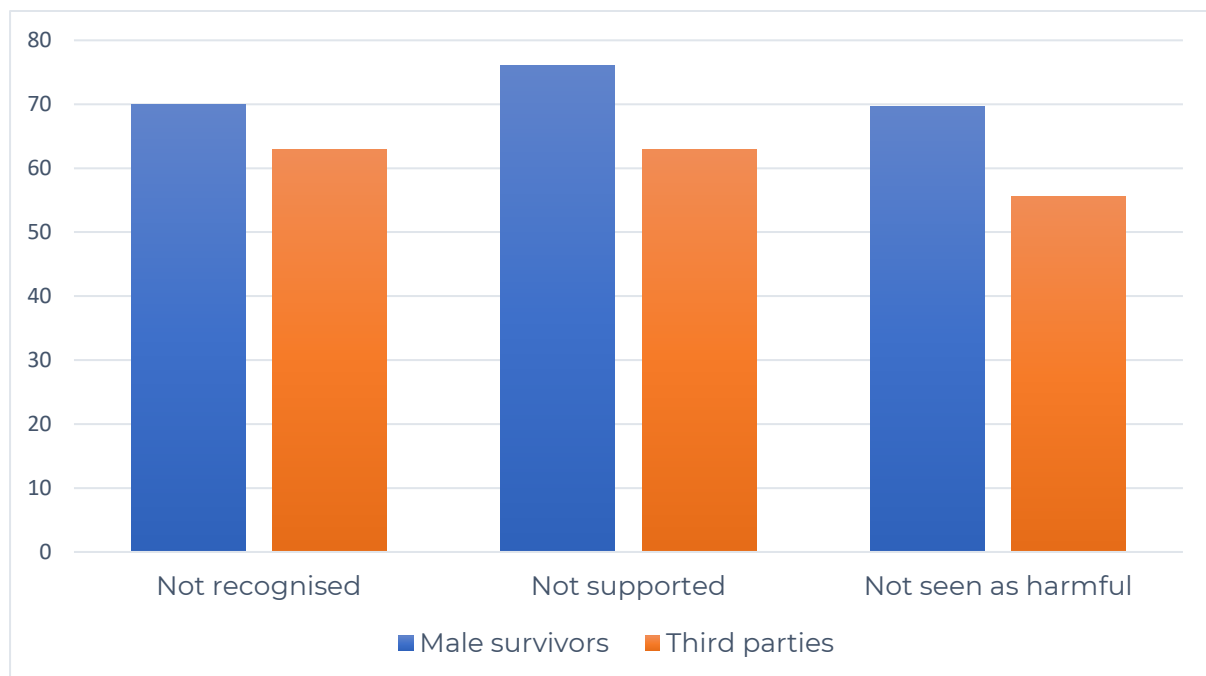
that they would not be believed, a lack of trust in the system, feelings of embarrassment and shame, and not recognising their experience as abusive.

MS2: *“I worry about not being believed.”*

MS13: *“I don’t trust systems, that men will be given right support. I would be laughed at and dismissed.”*

MS41: *“... thought I could overcome this by myself...”*

Figure 3: *Perceptions Around Male Experiences of Abuse.*



In terms of experiences being recognised more widely by the Government, public services and society, both male survivors (69.9%) and third-party perspectives (63.0%) **did not** feel the abusive experiences are recognised. Male survivors (76.0%) and third-party perspectives (63.0%) **did not** feel their abusive experiences were supported by the Government, public services or society. Male survivors (69.6%) and third-party perspectives (55.6%) **did not** feel men’s abusive experiences are seen as harmful by the Government, public services and society. The quotes below also reflect these views:

MS18: *"Laughed at by police when I spoke about what was going on. Was told by family her behaviour was because she loved me."*

MS28: *"In terms of the court system, I was actively discouraged from saying anything that wasn't positive about my ex-wife. I was emphatically told that doing so would mean I would lose contact with my son."*

MS42: *"A male seeking support is generally blamed for their circumstances or accused of actually being the perpetrator. Even where some sympathy is found, there's little that can be offered except off-the-record advice."*

MS44: *"I work in a DV team for the police. I would say at least 20% of the incidents that get passed to the team are male victims. The officers who are predominantly female are overheard making abusive and misandrist comments about male victims. A tactic used is to belittle men making complaints and use the threat of the female suspect removing child access if a police report is made. After viewing this I realised there is no help for people like me."*

MS236: *"Virtually all public awareness of domestic violence and abuse is focussed solely on females as victims. The notion that females are also perpetrators is completely alien and hidden."*

However, where males are believed and supported it was seen as valuable:

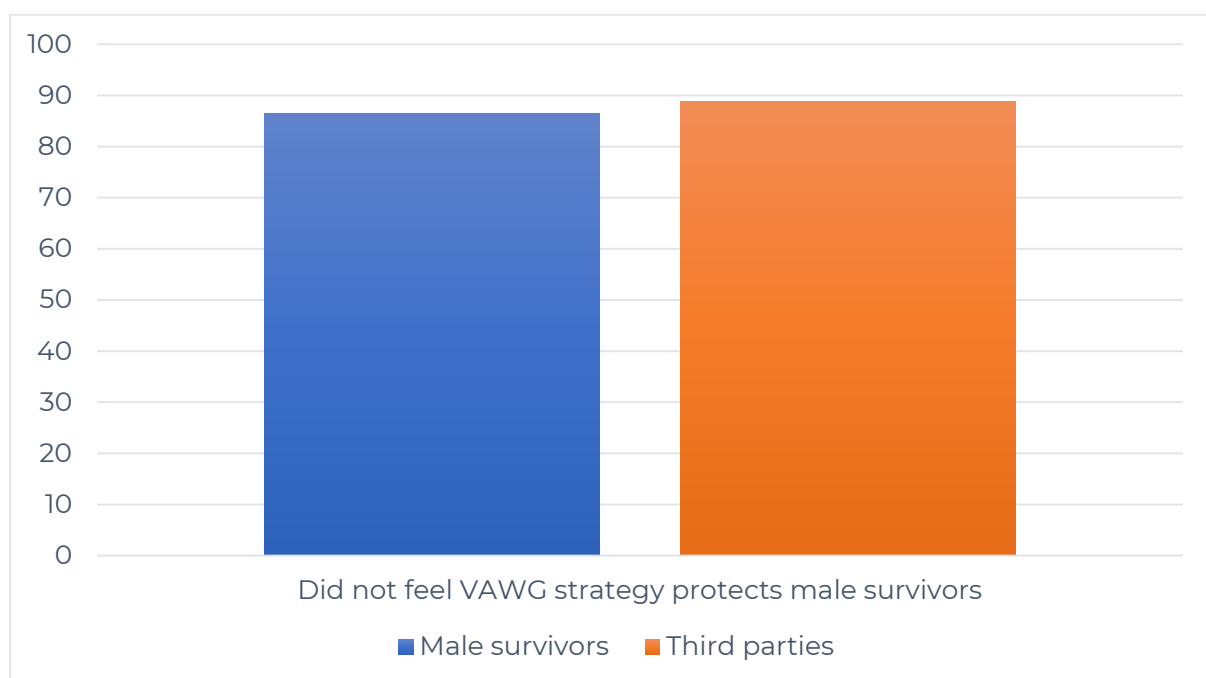
MS29: *"I have had a very positive experience. Police, Safenet, my employer and Housing have all been really supportive. I feel the experience has helped me open up and understand my feelings much better."*

MS158: *"Mankind Initiative and Fathers 4 Justice were the only agencies that helped. If not for them, I would be dead."*

This lack of recognition and support could be the result of how men's and boys' experiences of violence and abuse are categorised in terms of the VAWG strategy. When asked about whether they were aware that male survivors and survivors of these types of crimes are included under this

definition and explanation 64.3% of male survivors and 40.7% of third-party respondents indicated they were not aware of this. Additionally, male survivors (64.6%) and third-party respondents (74.1%) reported that they did not think this strategy *applied* to male survivors; male survivors (83.6%) and third-party respondents (88.9%) did not feel this strategy *included* male survivors; and perhaps most importantly male survivors (86.5%) and third-party respondents (88.9%) did not feel this strategy protects male survivors. Unsurprisingly male survivors (81.3%) and third-party others (77.8%) ultimately reported it was not appropriate for male survivors to be classed as survivors of violence against women and girls.

Figure 4: *Perceptions Around VAWG Strategy Protection for Male Survivors.*



Below are the perceived impacts of male survivors being classed as survivors of violence against women and girls, with respect to:

- **Accessing support** – 73.1% male survivors and 85.2% of third-party respondents feel there is a negative impact.
- **Service availability** – 74.3% male survivors and 77.8% of third-party respondents feel there is a negative impact.

- **Public information (campaigns/advertising/websites)** – 77.2% male survivors and 88.9% of third-party respondents feel there is a negative impact.
- **Recognition by society (including friends, family, work colleagues)** – 73.1% male survivors and 85.2% of third-party respondents feel there is a negative impact.
- **Being believed by public services (including police)** – 73.1% male survivors and 81.5% of third-party respondents feel there is a negative impact.
- **Minimising theirs and other survivors' experience** – 80.1% male survivors and 88.9% of third-party respondents feel there is a negative impact.
- **Male survivors feeling invisible** – 90.4% male survivors and 88.9% of third-party respondents feel there is a negative impact.
- **Male survivors feeling their experience do not matter to society** – 90.1% male survivors and 85.2% of third-party respondents feel there is a negative impact.
- **Male survivors feeling they are taken seriously** – 75.4% male survivors and 77.8% of third-party respondents feel there is a negative impact.
- **Male survivors feeling the Government does not care about their experience** – 88.0% male survivors and 85.2% of third-party respondents feel there is a negative impact.
- **Making it harder for survivors to seek help** – 88.9% male survivors and 92.6% of third-party respondents feel there is a negative impact.
- **Male survivors experiencing distress** – 89.2% male survivors and 88.9% of third-party respondents feel there is a negative impact.

In terms of how male survivors articulated feeling about being defined, classed and called a victim of violence against women and girls, the qualitative data obtained from the questionnaire predominantly



*are classified in this way?" (MS298), "where is the (victim of violence against) men and boys bit?" (MS271).*

The impact of the current VAWG strategy also has the potential to result in real world harm in terms of rather than protecting male survivors, instead actively abusing them *"it's a continuation of decades of state supported abuse towards fathers, children and members of the LGBTQ+ Community"* (MS291). Indeed, several respondents commented that this strategy approach is a form of 'gaslighting', that it is a *"homophobic 'who's the man and who's the woman' trope. He's been victim of sexual violence, so obviously that makes him the woman in the relationship"* (MS184).

Some respondents also expressed the opinion that it can also lead to secondary victimisation.

MS31: *"I feel completely devastated by it. I am a bisexual MAN. It feels as though I am being erased and ALL the pain and suffering is being hidden. Also, it is so damaging to describe men as women especially when we have been abused. I feel, and felt, so much shame. This makes it worse" and "It repeats the trauma & the authorities become part of the abuse."*

The majority of respondents felt the current VAWG strategy may actively disrupt male help-seeking.

MS36: *"I am someone who works in equality, diversity and inclusion. So, I am probably more inclined to seek help and consider myself a victim than others. However, there are some who would see this and take it as a sign that they are wrong to feel a victim. Had I read this a few years ago it would have completely derailed me in my efforts to seek support."*

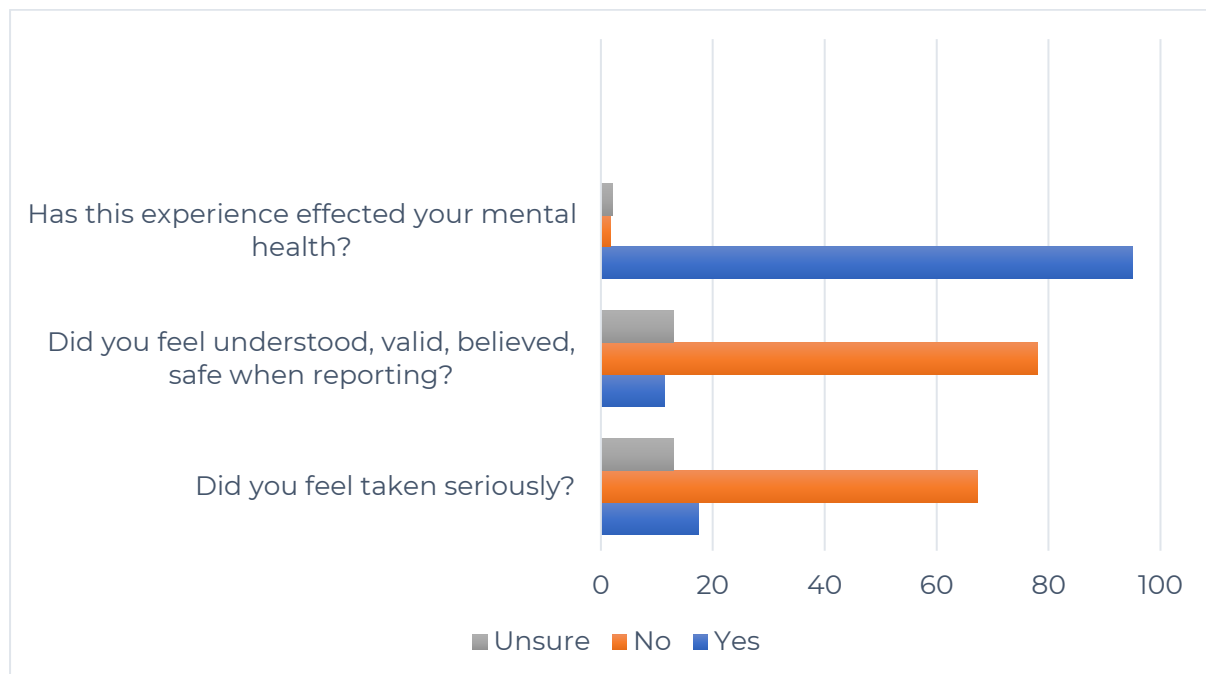
Respondents reflected this can lead to increased risk for males and their families.

MS34: *"I think when you are talking about such serious issues it is important to be precise with language. I don't think it helps women or girls to have*

men included in a definition that uses the terms women and girls. It was difficult for me to recognise myself. I should have stopped the behaviour against me many years before I did. I think being classed as this may have discouraged me further and placed me and my children in a more dangerous position”.

The male survivor responses to four questions are presented below in Figure 6 and clearly show the overwhelmingly negative impact that male survivors reported as a result of being a victim of a crime included within the VAWG strategy.

Figure 6: *The Impact of Male Survivors Being Classed as Victims of VAWG.*

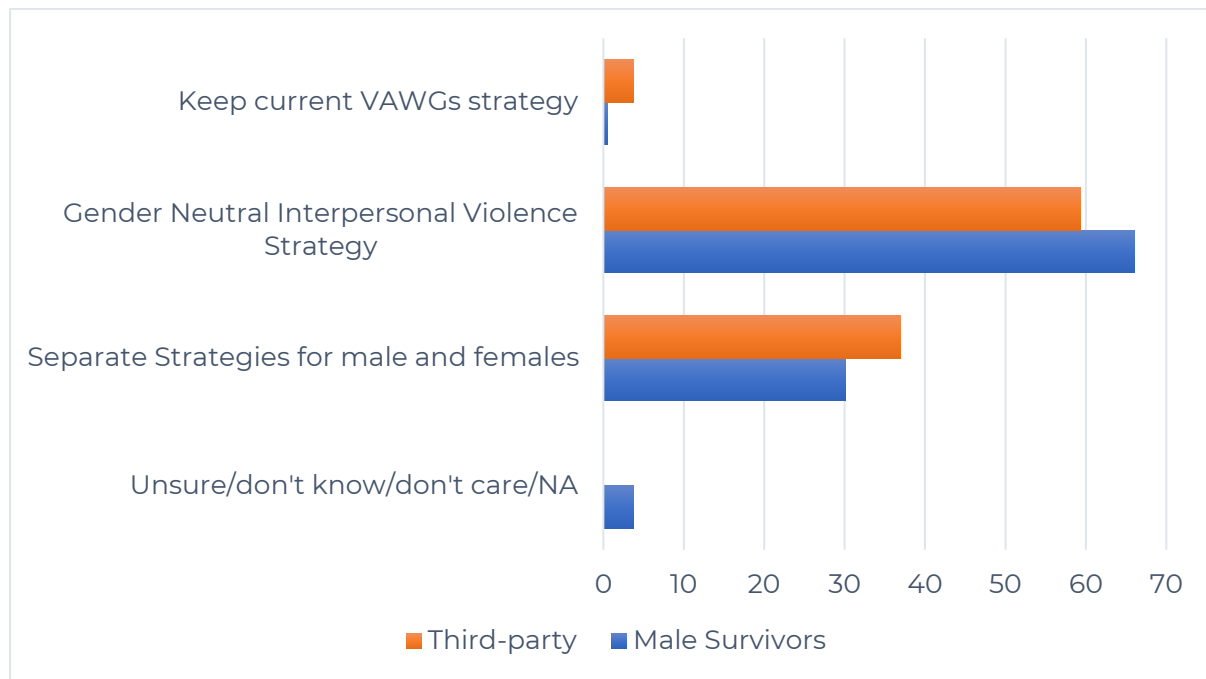


## What is the preferred solution?

Male survivors and third-party respondents were asked whether they felt that violence against men and boys should (a) remain under the VAWG strategy; (b) be covered a under separate violence against men and boys (VAMB) strategy; or (c) the types of interpersonal violence currently covered under the VAWG strategy, instead form a new gender-neutral strategy. The

majority of male survivors and third-party respondents preferred a gender neutral interpersonal violence strategy (66.1% and 59.3% respectively). Keeping the current VAWG strategy as it was overwhelmingly rejected.

Figure 7: Preferred Solution.



Undoubtedly, these findings strongly suggest that classifying male survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence and/or honour-related abuse as victims of VAWG is inappropriate at best and potentially harmful to the recovery of male survivors. The current study found the overwhelming majority of respondents endorsed the option of a gender-neutral intimate violence strategy (IVS). Many males were confused by the current VAWG strategy commenting *“I don't understand why we need abuse to be gendered. Regardless of your gender, abuse is disgusting and needs to be eradicated. Why do we need to make everything divisive and a competition between men and women? Just sort the abuse out.”* (MS7). Others felt that survivors of any gender experience similar negative outcomes *“I have some female friends who have gone through similar, so I understand their needs as well. I feel it needs to be re classified as intimate violence.”* (MS54).

There was also support for separate strategies with approximately a third of male survivors and third-party perspectives supporting this approach. Here survivors expressed a range of reasons including that *“whilst a single strategy would appear to be a logical solution, there are too many differences between male centric and female centric abuse patterns to have a “one size fits all” strategy. We, as a society need to understand that we have our differences and that they need to be treated accordingly.”* (MS152). Other survivors argued that separate strategies are needed because *“... the out-dated gender stereotypes that are currently still being actively perpetuated by the Government and activist groups are so powerful that male victims will still be lost in a supposedly inclusive strategy - even if it doesn't deliberately discriminate against them as VAWG does. Thus, a separate Violence Against Men And Boys Strategy would seem the best as it will clearly signpost men and boys as victims (thereby encouraging them to recognise their abuse and come forward)”*. (MS161).

Finally, there is the possibility that separate strategies may be needed initially as there is a need to *“build towards a gender inclusive approach... this starts by having a dedicated men’s version and under an umbrella we include both VAWG and a male centred version.”* (MS6).

When asked what both they and others feel should change, the majority of participants felt a strategy for Intimate Violence that would include all genders is most appropriate (male survivors – 66.1%, third-party perspectives – 59.3%). Understandably this is a large change which would need to be made in terms of strategy, and whilst it could be considered progressive and inclusive, it can equally be said that given the gender-specific challenges and barriers men and women face in this area –parallel strategies would be the most appropriate and deliverable. The call for a gender-neutral strategy may well be a reflection of men not being recognised at all. Certainly it is important that there should not be an unintended consequence of reducing support or understanding of female victims. This would not be an acceptable solution.

30.1% of male survivors, and 37% of third-party perspectives felt one strategy for women and girls and a separate strategy for men and boys would be the next most appropriate change which needs to be made. Come what may, it is clear that only 0.6% of men (2 male survivors out of 342) believe men should be included in a VAWG strategy, which shows the current status quo is not supported by the only people that matter in this context – male survivors.

# Conclusions

- There appears to be a clear negative impact of the current VAWG strategy on male survivors in terms of recognising their abuse experiences as an offence, accessing support and being believed, and perceptions of how Government, public services and society view their abusive experiences.
- Male survivors who took part in this study do not feel recognised, protected or included in the current VAWG strategy.
- The preferred solution appears to be an inclusive IVS. Alongside the political challenges of replacing the VAWG strategy, there is the principle of men and women needing gender-informed/sensitive strategies taking into account the unique challenges they face because of their gender. Therefore, the report authors recommend that a parallel strategy is put in place for male survivors. This would negate the negative emotions and negative impact of those male victims featured in the research, without having a negative impact on female survivors.
- There is a need to conduct a further study with a broader recruitment strategy and larger sample to confirm these findings.

## Recommendations

- Government commissions a large survey to explore these findings with a representative sample of male survivors.
- Government consults male survivors and agencies that support them in terms of what a strategy for men and boys would include.
- Government consults with academics with expertise in men's victimisation, mental health and help-seeking.
- Government launches a sector wide and public consultation on the contents and implementation of an Intimate Violence Against Men and Boys Strategy.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1 – Quantitative Responses to Questionnaire (including unknown responses)

#### Country

	Male survivor	Other perspective
England	280 (81.4%)	23 (85.2%)
Northern Ireland	11 (3.2%)	-
Republic of Ireland	1 (0.3%)	-
Scotland	22 (6.4%)	1 (3.7%)
Wales	12 (3.5%)	3 (11.1%)
Unknown	16 (4.3%)	

#### Gender

	Male survivor	Other perspective
Male	324 (94.7%)	13 (48.1%)
Female	2 (0.6%)	13 (48.1%)
Transgender	-	1 (3.7%)
Non-binary	1 (0.3%)	-
Unknown	15 (4.1%)	

#### Ethnicity

	Male survivor	Other perspective
Asian/Asian British	22 (6.4%)	1 (3.7%)
Black/Black African/Caribbean/Black British	3 (0.9%)	1 (3.7%)
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups	9 (2.6%)	1 (3.7%)

Other Ethnic Group – not specified	8 (2.3%)	-
White/Caucasian	284 (83.0%)	23 (85.2%)
White/Roman	1 (0.3%)	-
Unknown	16 (4.3%)	

### Sexual orientation

	Male survivor	Other perspective
Bisexual	11 (3.2%)	1 (3.7%)
Gay or lesbian	8 (2.3%)	1 (3.7%)
Other sexual orientation– not specified	4 (1.2%)	1 (3.7%)
Straight or heterosexual	303 (88.6%)	24 (88.9%)
Unknown	16 (4.3%)	

### Time taken to recognise experience as abusive:

		Male survivor	Other perspective
1 >	Less than one year	28 (8.2%)	3 (11.1%)
1 > AR	Less than one year after relationship had ended	4 (1.2%)	-
1-4	1 year or more, 4 years or less	81 (23.7%)	4 (14.8%)
1-4 AR	1 year or more, 4 years or less after relationship had ended	6 (1.8%)	-
5-8	More than 4 years, 8 years or less	67 (19.6%)	1 (3.7%)
5-8 AR	More than 4 years, 8 years or less after relationship had ended	1 (0.3%)	-
9-12	More than 8 years, 12 years or less	40 (11.7%)	1 (3.7%)
9-12 AR	More than 8 years, 12 years or less after relationship had ended	2 (0.6%)	-
13-16	More than 12 years, 16 years or less	31 (9.1%)	-

17-20	More than 16 years, 20 years or less	16 (4.7%)	-
20 <	More than 20 years	21 (6.1%)	-
Unknown		63 (17.1%)	

### Have you/they tried to access support?

	Male survivor	Other perspective
Yes	252 (73.7%)	7 (25.9%)
No	75 (21.9%)	20 (74.1%)
Unknown		15 (4.1%)

### Did you/they report offence/s to police?

	Male survivor	Other perspective
Yes	154 (45.0%)	6 (22.2%)
No	87 (25.4%)	18 (66.7%)
Unsure	9 (2.6%)	3 (11.1%)
Not shown question (based on previous response)	75 (21.9%)	-
Unknown		17 (5.8%)

### Were you/they believed by police?

	Male survivor	Other perspective
Yes	39 (11.4%)	3 (11.1%)
No	80 (23.4%)	3 (11.1%)
Unsure	34 (9.9%)	-
Not shown question (based on previous response)	173 (55.0%)	21 (77.8%)
Unknown		16 (9.1%)

**Do you feel you/they were treated fairly?**

	Male survivor	Other perspective
Yes	47 (13.7%)	6 (22.2%)
No	165 (48.2%)	20 (74.1%)
Unsure	35 (10.2%)	-
Not shown question (based on previous response)	75 (21.9%)	-
Unknown	21 (7.1%)	

**In relation to accessing support...**

**Did you/do you think the find/found this easy?**

	Male survivor	Other perspective
Yes	36 (10.5%)	25 (96.2%)
No	205 (59.9%)	2 (7.4%)
Unsure	10 (2.9%)	-
Not shown question (based on previous response)	75 (21.9%)	-
Unknown	16 (5.4%)	

**Did you/they know where/how to access support?**

	Male survivor	Other perspective
Yes	56 (16.4%)	2 (7.4%)
No	173 (50.6%)	22 (81.5%)
Unsure	22 (6.4%)	3 (11.1%)
Not shown question (based on previous response)	75 (21.9%)	-
Unknown	16 (5.4%)	

**Did it take a long time?**

	Male survivor	Other perspective
Yes	181 (52.9%)	23 (85.2%)
No	42 (12.3%)	3 (11.1%)
Unsure	27 (7.9%)	1 (3.7%)
Not shown question (based on previous response)	75 (21.9%)	-
Unknown	17 (5.8%)	

**How confident were you/they contacting the following for support...**

<b>Support services?</b>		
	Male survivor	Other perspective
Confident	23 (6.7%)	2 (7.4%)
Not confident	190 (55.6%)	23 (85.2%)
Unsure	36 (10.5%)	2 (7.4%)
Not shown question (based on previous response)	75 (21.9%)	-
Unknown	18 (6.1%)	
<b>Friends?</b>		
	Male survivor	Other perspective
Confident	71 (20.8%)	6 (22.2%)
Not confident	147 (43.0%)	15 (55.6%)
Unsure	33 (9.6%)	6 (22.2%)
Not shown question (based on previous response)	75 (21.9%)	-
Unknown	16 (5.4%)	
<b>Family?</b>		
	Male survivor	Other perspective

Confident	92 (26.9%)	8 (29.6%)
Not confident	133 (38.9%)	15 (55.6%)
Unsure	25 (7.3%)	4 (14.8%)
Not shown question (based on previous response)	75 (21.9%)	-
Unknown	17 (5.8%)	
<b>Employers?</b>		
	Male survivor	Other perspective
Confident	33 (9.6%)	2 (7.4%)
Not confident	173 (50.6%)	21 (77.8%)
Unsure	41 (12.0%)	4 (14.8%)
Not shown question (based on previous response)	75 (21.9%)	-
Unknown	21 (7.1%)	

### When contacting services for support...

<b>Did you feel that you/they were taken seriously?</b>		
	Male survivor	Other perspective
Yes	77 (22.5%)	3 (11.1%)
No	136 (39.8%)	20 (74.1%)
I did not contact services for support	12 (3.5%)	-
Unknown	121 (32.8%)	
<b>Was it a positive experience?</b>		
	Male survivor	Other perspective
Yes	63 (18.4%)	4 (14.8%)
No	148 (43.3%)	21 (77.8%)
I did not contact services for support	10 (2.9%)	-
Unknown	123 (33.3%)	

<b>Were you/they believed?</b>		
	Male survivor	Other perspective
Yes	84 (24.6%)	4 (14.8%)
No	97 (28.4%)	19 (70.4%)
I did not contact services for support	11 (3.2%)	-
Unknown	154 (41.7%)	
<b>Were they able to offer you/them appropriate support?</b>		
	Male survivor	Other perspective
Yes	64 (18.7%)	3 (11.1%)
No	154 (45.0%)	22 (81.5%)
I did not contact services for support	10 (2.9%)	-
Unknown	111 (30.1%)	

**To what extent do you feel your/their abusive experiences are recognised by the government, public services, and society?**

	Male survivor	Other perspective
Well recognised	6 (1.8%)	2 (7.4%)
Recognised	5 (1.5%)	1 (3.7%)
Somewhat recognised	77 (22.5%)	7 (25.9%)
Not recognised	239 (69.9%)	17 (63.0%)
Unknown	15 (4.1%)	

**To what extent do you feel your/their abusive experiences are supported by the government, public services, and society?**

	Male survivor	Other perspective
Well supported	7 (2.0%)	2 (7.4%)
Supported	11 (3.2%)	1 (3.7%)

Somewhat supported	55 (15.9%)	3 (11.1%)
Not supported	263 (76.0%)	21 (77.8%)
Unknown	6 (1.6%)	

**To what extent do you feel that the general the government, public services, and society recognise your/their experience/s was/were harmful?**

	Male survivor	Other perspective
Mostly	14 (4.1%)	3 (11.1%)
At times	75 (21.9%)	9 (33.3%)
Not recognised at all	238 (69.6%)	15 (55.6%)
Unknown	15 (4.1%)	

**Were you aware that male victims and survivors of these types of crimes are included under this definition and explanation?**

	Male survivor	Other perspective
Yes	92 (26.9%)	13 (48.1%)
No	220 (64.3%)	11 (40.7%)
Unsure	15 (4.4%)	3 (11.1%)
Unknown	5 (1.4%)	

**What does the strategy mean to you?**

<b>Do you feel that this strategy applies to you/them?</b>		
	Male survivor	Other perspective
Yes	55 (16.1%)	4 (14.8%)
No	221 (64.6%)	20 (74.1%)
Unsure	48 (14.0%)	3 (11.1%)
Unknown	18 (4.9%)	

<b>Do you/they feel included in this strategy?</b>		
	Male survivor	Other perspective
Yes	14 (4.1%)	3 (11.1%)
No	286 (83.6%)	24 (88.9%)
Unsure	24 (7.0%)	-
Unknown	18 (4.9%)	
<b>Do you/they feel protected under this strategy?</b>		
	Male survivor	Other perspective
Yes	6 (1.8%)	2 (7.4%)
No	296 (86.5%)	24 (88.9%)
Unsure	23 (6.7%)	1 (3.7%)
Unknown	17 (4.6%)	

**Do you think male survivors being classed as victims of violence against women and girls is appropriate?**

	Male survivor	Other perspective
Yes	31 (9.1%)	5 (18.5%)
No	278 (81.3%)	21 (77.8%)
Unsure	15 (4.4%)	1 (3.7%)
Unknown	18 (4.9%)	

**Do you feel there is an impact on male survivors being classed as victims of violence against women and girls, with respect to:**

<b>Accessing support?</b>		
	Male survivor	Other perspective
Yes	256 (74.9%)	24 (88.9%)
No	37 (10.8%)	2 (7.4%)

Unsure	30 (8.8%)	1 (3.7%)
Unknown	18 (5.1%)	
<b>Service availability?</b>		
	Male survivor	Other perspective
Yes	254 (74.3%)	21 (77.8%)
No	44 (12.9%)	3 (11.1%)
Unsure	39 (11.4%)	3 (11.1%)
Unknown	5 (1.4%)	
<b>Public information (campaigns/advertising/websites)?</b>		
	Male survivor	Other perspective
Yes	264 (77.2%)	24 (88.9%)
No	49 (14.3%)	2 (7.4%)
Unsure	21 (6.1%)	1 (3.7%)
Unknown	8 (2.2%)	
<b>Recognition by society (including friends, family, work colleagues)?</b>		
	Male survivor	Other perspective
Yes	250 (73.1%)	23 (85.2%)
No	50 (14.6%)	2 (7.4%)
Unsure	31 (9.1%)	2 (7.4%)
Unknown	11 (3.0%)	
<b>Being believed by public services (including police)?</b>		
	Male survivor	Other perspective
Yes	250 (73.1%)	22 (81.5%)
No	55 (16.1%)	3 (11.1%)
Unsure	31 (9.1%)	2 (7.4%)
Unknown	6 (1.6%)	
<b>Minimising yours/theirs and other survivors' experience?</b>		

	Male survivor	Other perspective
Yes	274 (80.1%)	24 (88.9%)
No	31 (9.1%)	2 (7.4%)
Unsure	28 (8.2%)	1 (3.7%)
Unknown	9 (2.4%)	
<b>You and other survivors' feeling invisible?</b>		
	Male survivor	Other perspective
Yes	309 (90.4%)	24 (88.9%)
No	13 (3.8%)	1 (3.7%)
Unsure	11 (3.2%)	2 (7.4%)
Unknown	9 (2.4%)	
<b>You and other survivors' feeling your experience does not matter to society?</b>		
	Male survivor	Other perspective
Yes	308 (90.1%)	23 (85.2%)
No	11 (3.2%)	2 (7.4%)
Unsure	15 (4.4%)	2 (7.4%)
Unknown	8 (2.2%)	
<b>You and other survivors' feeling that you are taken seriously?</b>		
	Male survivor	Other perspective
Yes	258 (75.4%)	21 (77.8%)
No	59 (17.3%)	2 (7.4%)
Unsure	18 (5.3%)	4 (14.8%)
Unknown	7 (1.9%)	
<b>Making you and other survivors' feeling that the government does not care about your experience?</b>		

	Male survivor	Other perspective
Yes	301 (88.0%)	23 (85.2%)
No	15 (4.4%)	2 (7.4%)
Unsure	18 (5.3%)	1 (3.7%)
Unknown	9 (2.4%)	
<b>Making it harder for survivors to seek help?</b>		
	Male survivor	Other perspective
Yes	304 (88.9%)	25 (92.6%)
No	12 (3.5%)	1 (3.7%)
Unsure	19 (5.6%)	1 (3.7%)
Unknown	7 (1.9%)	
<b>You and other survivors experiencing distress?</b>		
	Male survivor	Other perspective
Yes	305 (89.2%)	24 (88.9%)
No	13 (3.8%)	1 (3.7%)
Unsure	16 (4.7%)	2 (7.4%)
Unknown	8 (2.2%)	

**In the words of other male survivors...**

<b>Has anything that you've come across, be it a question or be it a statement or be it a policy or whatever, made you feel less masculine?</b>	
Yes	189 (55.3%)
No	96 (28.1%)
Unsure	52 (15.2%)
Unknown	5 (1.5%)
<b>Did you feel taken seriously as a man when you were reporting?</b>	
Yes	60 (17.5%)
No	230 (67.3%)

Unsure	44 (12.9%)
Unknown	8 (2.3%)
<b>Did you feel understood, valid, believed, and safe?</b>	
Yes	39 (11.4%)
No	267 (78.1%)
Unsure	29 (8.5%)
Unknown	7 (2.0%)
<b>Has your experience of abuse affected your mental health?</b>	
Yes	325 (95.0%)
No	6 (1.8%)
Unsure	7 (2.0%)
Unknown	4 (1.2%)
<b>Has your experience of abuse led to feelings of shame and dishonour?</b>	
Yes	277 (81.0%)
No	40 (11.7%)
Unsure	19 (5.6%)
Unknown	6 (1.8%)
<b>Have false allegations been made against you?</b>	
Yes	271 (79.2%)
No	46 (13.5%)
Unsure	22 (6.4%)
Unknown	3 (0.1%)

**Overall if you have a choice about this strategy what would you prefer?**

	Male survivor	Other perspective
One strategy for women and girls and a separate strategy for men and boys	103 (30.1%)	10 (37%)
A strategy for Intimate Violence that would include all genders	226 (66.1%)	16 (59.3%)

Leave it, as it is fine to have men covered under the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy	2 (0.6%)	1 (3.7%)
Unsure	5 (1.5%)	-
I do not care	2 (0.6%)	-
Unknown	6 (1.6%)	

“

**“I am an invisible man. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids – and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me.”**

**— Ralph Ellison**