

## **The media's invisible men: gay and straight domestic abuse victims**

As a charity that supports male victims of domestic abuse, Thursday (15 July 2010) summed up the exasperation we, and many of those that contact us, feel about the way that some sections of the British media choose to report this subject. This includes both gay and straight men.

Early that morning, the latest [British Crime Survey](#) was published and showed that one in four women and one in seven men said they had been victims of domestic abuse in 2009/2010 . Doing the math, for every three victims, two were female and one was male.

Later that morning, the Home Secretary, Theresa May, spoke before the Home Affairs Select Committee. During the questioning she was tackled on the issue of domestic abuse and said she was considering allowing the police to randomly visit people convicted of domestic violence to stop them reoffending. At no stage did she say this would only apply to men who had perpetrated domestic abuse against women.

As well as the fact that domestic abuse legislation and police operational issues remain gender neutral, she could not say that such a policy would only apply to male-on-female domestic abuse. The Home Office itself recognises male-on-male, female-on-female and female-on-male domestic abuse also exists, although it puts little resource into these areas.

But hey, let's not worry about looking at domestic abuse from such a rounded perspective if it stops headline writers from going for the cheap and easy shot.

The headlines that greeted Theresa May's gender neutral announcement in some of the national newspapers included '[Wife beaters could face random police to visit to discourage reoffending, Theresa May says](#)' (Daily Telegraph 15 June 2010), '[Police could get more power to do spot checks on homes of men convicted of domestic violence](#)' (Daily Mail, 15 June 2010) and 'Wife beaters face surprise visits by police' (The Times 16 July 2010). Sorry there is no link to the Times article, the pay wall and all that.

This is an all too common occurrence. The outcome of which is that when domestic abuse is only reported from one out of the, at least, four different perspectives, it ends up leaving a whole segment of the victim population out in the cold. It also influences wider public policy at both a national and local level, especially as there continues to be scant resource or attention on male victims, whether gay or straight.

Often men that call our charity looking for help and information have suffered in silence for years. Part of the reason why they have done so is because they see

the way that some newspapers only report domestic abuse from a male-on-female perspective. This is often reinforced by similar one-sided PR campaigns from many local councils and police forces. They feel therefore that they will not be taken seriously if they reported what they were going through.

If as a society we are going to treat domestic abuse as a crime with victims and perpetrators from both genders, it is time that headline writers stopped relying on producing the headlines of yesteryear and better reflected what is happening in our society. Male victims do exist; they should no longer be invisible.

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16<sup>th</sup> July 2010