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BBC Complaints
PO Box 1922
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Dear BBC

RE: Newsnight (7 January 2014 edition): debate on domestic abuse

I am writing on behalf of The ManKind Initiative, a national charity supporting male victims of domestic abuse, to register a complaint about the editorial stance taken by the episode of Newsnight at the above time on the above subject. This was a general feature on domestic abuse and not one that was gender-specific.

My complaint is that during the debate and through the videos on domestic abuse, at no stage were male victims or female perpetrators of domestic abuse mentioned or recognised by the presenter, Jeremy Paxman. This is a misleading and biased portrayal of domestic abuse in the UK, made worse by the fact that an editorial decision must have been taken to exclude any recognition of male victims.

(1) Presenters comments

In his opening remarks, Mr Paxman, stated “...*although a figure of over one million women a year is often given as a indication of the scale and many women have difficulty persuading the police to take them seriously.*”

This figure for female victims (1.2 million) is from the Home Office’s annual British Crime Survey¹ but the same survey, on the same page and same table the research states that 800,000 men suffer every year. The complaint therefore is that Newsnight deliberately chose not to include the figures on male victims thereby failing to give a full, balanced and accurate representation of domestic abuse in the UK to its viewers. It must have been deliberate due to

the fact that the figures for female victims are adjacent to those of male victims in the Home Office report.

The same issue applies to that part of the statement that female victims have difficulty persuading the police to take them seriously, as this statement implies that the police take male victims seriously – when the truth is that often victims of both genders have difficulty persuading the police to take them seriously.

Both issues mean the BBC producers failed to apply the BBC's editorial guidelines, because Newsnight deliberately failed to recognise that victims of domestic abuse in the UK include victims of both genders.

The specific guidelines which were breached include:

1.2.2	1.2.6	3.2.1	3.2.2
3.2.3	3.4.2	4.2.1	4.4.1
4.4.2	4.4.19	5.4.18	

(2) Video presentation

This charity of course has no complaint about the fact that the videos portrayed male perpetrators and female victims, however, no video was produced depicting a male victim and/or a female perpetrator.

This again reinforces the opening section by ignoring the existence of male victims of domestic abuse in the UK. If there were to be films highlighting all victims, either one of the two films should show male victims, or if there were three clips, one should depict a male victim. However, the BBC misleadingly decided to show no male victims.

(3) Panelists

We would not expect the two guests to take a stance on male victims given one represents a charity supporting female victims and the other guest a charity concerned with male perpetrators of domestic abuse. There is no complaint against the guests as they were representing the interests of the organisations they support. However, again to ensure a fair reflection of domestic abuse, Newsnight should have included an organisation that provides support to male victims thereby giving balance to the discussion.

(4) Conclusion

In summary, the producers of Newsnight failed to recognise the existence of male victims of domestic abuse on a general feature about domestic abuse. This meant the feature was

inaccurate and, misleading to viewers – reinforcing the lazy stereotype that all domestic abuse is perpetrated by men on women. It was in breach of many of the BBC's editorial guidelines.

It is a shame that this complaint is necessary as in other areas of the BBC, this balance has been achieved so that whenever there is a feature or story on domestic abuse, both female and male victims are featured. Sadly, Newsnight failed to follow this enlightened and accurate representation of domestic abuse in the UK today.

I look forward to this matter being addressed both on this occasion and on any future Newsnight features on domestic abuse. I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

M J Brooks

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- 1 Office for National Statistics: Crime Survey (Focus on Violent Crime and Sexual Offences, 2011/12 - http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_298904.pdf Page 62) - Seven per cent of women and 5% of men were estimated to have experienced any domestic abuse in 2011/12, equivalent to an estimated 1.2 million female and 800,000 male victims.