

## **How can there be equality for all domestic abuse victims when a judge says a male victim is 'weak'?**

When the [news](#) appeared last week on the case of Dennis Long who stabbed his partner of 30 years to death and was subsequently jailed for four years and eight months, what was striking beyond the tragedy for all involved were the comments made by the judge and the media reporting.

Certainly I do not condone the actions of Long in any shape or form but there are issues that show there is still some way to go before male victims of domestic abuse are seen in equal terms to female victims.

When Judge John Milford was sentencing Long he said "You are a placid, unassertive, rather weak man", as well as stating that as the breadwinner he should have permanently moved out of the family home.

The key litmus test is whether the judge would have made the same comments if the genders had been reversed. Rightly, I cannot see any possibility where a judge would say or even feel comfortable in stating that a woman who had been a victim of domestic abuse for 30 years was "a rather weak woman", but the judge felt comfortable in saying this to a male victim. The same applies when Long was told he should have left because he was the 'breadwinner' - an irrelevant issue. Would a judge say that if Long was female. I think not.

What is so appalling about these out-of-date, out-of-touch and sexist comments is that at its heart it places the responsibility on the victim not on the person carrying out the domestic abuse. Male victims, like female victims, are not weak, and it sends out the wrong message to say they are. No wonder twice as many men as women choose not to tell anyone about the domestic abuse they are suffering when this is the attitude of the judiciary. No victim of domestic abuse, whether female or male, should ever be described in this way and the judge obviously needs a better understanding of the power and control that perpetrators hold over their victim.

In terms of the media reporting, Long was commonly described as being a 'hen-pecked' man, husband or killer. This was the headline or opening line in [The Independent](#), [Daily Mail](#), [Daily Mirror](#) and [Daily Express](#) and clearly based on a seaside postcard worldview which surely in 2010 should not be still common currency. Again, it comes down to how male and female victims are viewed, because it can hardly be said that someone, as in Long's case, who had been repeatedly beaten with an ornamental poker was 'hen-pecked'. It trivialises what Long had gone through and again, headline writers would rightly never describe a woman in this way.

As a charity that supports male victims of domestic abuse, ManKind's records show that around one in three calls are from mothers and sisters seeking help for their sons or brothers because they won't pick up the phone themselves. A common reason for this is that the brother or son feels that he will not be taken seriously and worries about being portrayed as 'weak', so would rather suffer in silence at home than do anything about it.

When Judge Milford said that Long was weak, all he does is re-emphasise the feeling many male victims have and makes it harder for them to seek the help they need. That ultimately is why his comments are so damaging.

Mark Brooks is Chair of the [ManKind Initiative](#) charity.

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