



## **Statement on “Screening and Assessing” Callers to Anonymous Helplines To Root Out “Male Perpetrators in Disguise”**

*November 2017*

“Screening” or “Assessing” callers to anonymous male domestic abuse helpline on the initial assumption that a sizeable number of callers will be perpetrators in disguise is not a supported practice by the ManKind Initiative.

There are five reasons, based on good practice, ethics and equality on why screening callers to anonymous male domestic abuse helplines is not supported.

The ManKind Initiative who are the first ever charity in the UK to support male victims and has run a helpline throughout its 15 year existence and managed by an Independent Domestic Violence Adviser, do not screen its callers (1,500 calls per year) for these reasons. On average, a man will take three years to disclose they are a victim and 80% of callers (four out of five) to the ManKind Initiative helpline have never told anyone before until they called..

It is also vital to remember that when running any domestic abuse helpline (male or female), as well as the adult who is disclosing, there will likely be children in the household (two out of every three men who call the ManKind Initiative helpline have children) and you are indirectly supporting those children – so any wrong assessment over an anonymous helpline affects them as well.

### **(1) Good practice/appropriateness**

Simply put, it is extremely difficult to assess over a telephone call to a vulnerable adult who is disclosing, very often for the first time, whether they are telling the truth or not. In face to face situations, this can and should be undertaken. Screening callers at this time (helpline) in their domestic abuse journey and making a wrong assessment will be damaging to that individual. Thereby, it runs counter to the point of operating a helpline to support male victims.

Helplines will provide emotional/listening support, practical information on how to escape and signposting. It would be expected that in signposting to services such as the police, local authority, solicitors and local delivery services – this is where screening/assessing would be the appropriate place to make such a judgement.

### **(2) Supporting a vulnerable adult**

Following from the above, for victims of domestic abuse, and male victims more so – albeit this is not to diminish the acute barriers female victims face, disclosing you are a male victim of domestic abuse is a huge first step on the flight to safety. As stated,

men will on average have been a victim for three years before disclosing and the main reason why disclosure is such a huge first step for men is the fear of not being believed or taken seriously – often the fear of being laughed at. This is not necessarily such a big factor for female victims generally, albeit it will be for many.

As on any helplines for vulnerable adults (Samaritans) and children (Childline), the first five seconds of any call is the most crucial time period. A friendly welcome, acknowledgement and belief is vital - anything else and the man will hang up, never call a helpline/disclose again and may never escape. This all adds to the feeling that no one will believe him and lead to questioning himself, which makes him even more vulnerable.

If a man feels that he is not being believed that he is a victim – that he is being assessed/screened, he will hang up.

We regularly have callers from to the ManKind Initiative helpline who have spoken to other helplines and have felt they have not been believed, and have rung us instead. On average, this is 6-8 per month.

### **(3) Helpline efficacy**

The reason for the need for creating anonymous helplines for vulnerable adults (beneficiaries) is because they will provide the support they need. For instance, the ManKind Initiative helpline is anonymous because 50% of callers tell us they only called because it **is** anonymous. If you run a helpline and one of key tenets is to screen/assess/test whether someone is telling the truth or not goes against the reason or setting up a helpline in the first place.

### **(4) Ethics**

It is unethical to set up and promote a helpline for male victims of domestic abuse (or any helpline in fact) without telling potential callers upfront (on the call or on websites/promotion) that they will be screened/assessed. This is why screening domestic abuse helpline callers in case they are “perpetrators in disguise” is not accepted practice. It is deliberately giving false information to a caller by not disclosing this and deliberately giving them a false expectation.

### **(5) Equality, inclusion and fairness**

Rightly, helplines for female victims do not screen/assess female victims who call and disclose because it not an acceptable and ethical practice. The question therefore is why should any helpline do so for men on basis of every victim being viewed equally regardless of gender.