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Honorary Patrons – Lord Cotter, John Penrose MP, Ann Goodchild, Paul Chivers and Sara Westle

Briefing: House of Lords Debate 6 June 2019
Government's plans to support victims of domestic violence and abuse:
Male Victims of Domestic Abuse

(1) Key Statistics:

- In 2017/18, equivalent to an estimated 695,000 male victims and 1.316 million female victims. In 17/18, 2.4% of men (equivalent to 404,000) and 5.6% of women (equivalent to 936,000) experienced partner abuse (non-sexual). **For every three victims of partner/domestic abuse, two will be female and one will be male¹.**
- Nearly half of male victims fail to tell anyone they are a victim of domestic (only 51% tell anyone). They are nearly three times less likely to tell anyone than a female victim (49% as opposed to 19%). This has worsened since 2015/16 where the figures were 61% for men (88% women)².
- The current Government and others often quote that only 5% of victims of domestic abuse who are high risk are men but that does not take into account the large number of men who do not attempt to seek help from public services (so are not in the 'system' and are therefore not assessed). As well as under-reporting, we also know there is a level of under-recording of risk for male victims and also non-recording (signposting men onto national helplines rather than local support agencies). Often the Government and others use the 5% as a proxy for the number of overall male victims and do not place any caveats on the levels of under-recording.
- There are 270 organisations providing services to male victims in March 2019. In 2012, the figure was 70. The vast majority of these services are provided by organisations providing services for women and men.
- 30 organisations offer refuge or safe house provision for male victims in the UK - a total of 150 spaces. 34 spaces are dedicated to male victims only (the rest being for victims of either gender).³
- In a report by IBB Solicitors in 2019, 34% of men stated they had experienced being in a coercive /controlling relationship⁴.

¹ ONS domestic abuse: findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales: year ending March 2018 (<https://bit.ly/2FY8UYc>) - Table 1

² ONS domestic abuse: findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales: year ending March 2018 (<https://bit.ly/2FY8UYc>) – Table 24

³ ONS BCS Focus on Violent Crime and Sexual Offences 2016/17 <http://bit.ly/2G9nGPY>

⁴ MAKING LEGISLATION WORK MORE EFFECTIVELY FOR VICTIMS by IBB Solicitors: <https://www.ibblaw.co.uk/insights/publications/controlling-or-coercive-behaviour-making-legislation-work-more-effectively?view=microsite>

(2) Government Position: Areas of Support

- 2.1 We support the Government in ensuring that the name of the Bill, the statutory definition of domestic abuse and the related statutory guidance is fully gender neutral.

There are many charities and other leading voices who have called for the name of the bill and the statutory definition to be “gendered” – that is to specifically define domestic abuse as an issue affecting heterosexual women. This would give unequal status to victims based on their gender and not on their individual risk or need which is more important. This would place male and LGBT+ victims at a disadvantage at a statutory, legal and service provision level. This would be out of keeping with a modern, inclusive and equality based country that fully respects diversity. We also believe it would be against the “British Constitution” to give one gender a higher legal status than another for a crime that affects all genders.

- 2.2. We support the Government’s intention of taking a more proactive and focussed stance on domestic abuse and a number of the measures within the proposed Bill. These measures include:

- placing the definition of domestic abuse on a statutory footing
- the proposed inclusion of Economic Abuse in the new legal definition of domestic abuse
- the creation of a Domestic Abuse Commissioner
- the need to ensure there is “Equality of Arms” in family courts where domestic abuse accusations are a feature
- the commitment and funding to support male victims of domestic abuse which has already included this year, a cross Government statement on male victims of domestic abuse and other related crimes (sexual violence, stalking, forced marriage for example)

(3) Government Position: Areas of Change

- 3.1. **Alignment with Scottish legislation on coercive and controlling behaviour:** We believe that the current legislation on coercive and controlling behaviour for England and Wales should be aligned with the new legislation in Scotland (Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018). The Scottish Law (introduced in April 2019) allows for coercive and controlling behaviour to be defined by (ex) partners who are no longer living in the same property. The English and Welsh legislation only applies if (ex) partners are living in the same property. We believe having one statutory definition for the same type of domestic abuse crime in one part of the country that is different in another makes no sense and the Scottish law is broader and more relevant to the realities of domestic abuse especially where the partners are no longer together.
- 3.2 **Parental Alienation:** Increasingly recognised by the legal professionals and practitioners in family law and parental conflict, we believe this should also be included in the proposed statutory definition of domestic abuse as it is clearly a form of coercive and controlling behaviour.
- 3.3. **Child Arrangement Orders:** We also believe that deliberate, wilful and continual breaches of Child Arrangement Orders awarded by Family Courts should also be classed as coercive and controlling behaviour. This can often also lead to economic abuse.

- 3.4. **Ending Intimate Violence Against Men and Boys:** While we support the Government's recent announcement (March 2019) on better cross-governmental support for male victims of domestic abuse we continue to be disappointed that the Government continues to place all victims of domestic abuse under their Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy which includes male victims. We support, as does the former Victims Commissioner, Baroness Newlove, the need for a parallel "Ending Intimate Violence Against Men and Boys" strategy. This would also cover male victims of crimes such as sexual abuse, sexual violence, stalking, forced marriages and 'so-called' honour-based crimes.

(4) Additional Points

- 4.1. If the UK is to ensure that it has a modern, inclusive and equality based approach to domestic abuse based on the individual need and risk, we would want to ensure that:
- **given the paucity of refuge and safe house provision for male victims of domestic abuse** (and their children), we believe that any new statutory requirements on local authorities must include this victim group. It continues to be the case that in some parts of the UK, including London, there are no such places for men and their children to escape to.
 - the appointed **domestic abuse commissioner** has an inclusive, multi-dimensional and equality based view of domestic abuse.
 - guidance on **Relationships and Sex Education in secondary schools is inclusive** ensuring equal recognition and focus is given to male and LGBTQ+ victims as well as heterosexual female victims.
 - **the national narrative, culture and conversation** on domestic abuse is more inclusive to encompass male and LGBTQ+ victims, including more awareness campaigns.

5. About the ManKind Initiative

- 5.1. The ManKind Initiative is the first British charity to support male victims of domestic abuse and we are the main charity in the UK solely dedicated to male victims. Since 2001, we have been at the forefront of providing services, support and campaigning for male victims ensuring that they (and their children) receive the support and recognition they need.
- 5.2. Our aim is to ensure all male victims of domestic abuse are supported to enable them to escape from the situation they are in. We are gender inclusive in our approach so whilst we are a service provider for men, we want all female victims (and their children) to escape too so do not want services or funding switched from female to male victims. We do not believe domestic abuse support and recognition for victims should be based on a "competition" between the genders.
- 5.3. Our core services include a national helpline which receives 1,800 calls per year (25% of calls are from family members, friends and work colleagues – often women), a popular website, a training programme and a national conference. We are delivering Home Office funded training for police forces and HM Treasury funded support to the Armed Forces. We also advised the Crown Prosecution Service and the Home Office on their male victims' of VAWG crime statements

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