



Flook House, Belvedere Road, Taunton, TA1 1BT
admin@mankind.org.uk : www.mankind.org.uk 01823 334229
Registered Charity No. 1089547 – Company Registration No. 3869893
Honorary Patrons – Lord Cotter, John Penrose MP, Sara Westle, Ann Goodchild and Paul Chivers

Media and Policy Briefing: Male Victims of Domestic Abuse and Covid-19

Briefing 2 (19 04 2020)

These short weekly briefings will set out a range of issues that we are finding through our direct support to male victims alongside those of organisations and practitioners that we speak to. This forms part of the wider role the charity has in giving male victims a voice and supporting those in the sector that support, or want to support, them.

(1) Direct Support from ManKind Initiative:

- a) Calls to the ManKind Initiative helpline in the last three weeks (since 30th March 2020) are 20% higher than in normal periods. The first two weeks (30th to 9th) saw a 35% increase but slightly fewer calls were taken this week (14-17th albeit two long calls on Friday) hence the figure is 20% overall. There was an initial fall in the week before and the week after lockdown (a lot of employers were sending people home on the week before the 23rd) but the period thereafter is now higher than normal.
 - b) Visitors to the ManKind Initiative website are 20% higher than normal over the last three weeks (since 30th March 2020), however, there was sharp increase this week. This week's total was 40% higher than normal.
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(2) Experiences from practitioners

- a) The charity regularly speaks to organisations and practitioners. Over the past week, they have reported a slowdown in the number of men coming forward or being referred to them, mainly because they cannot get out to get help.
 - b) A discussion with practitioners on Friday noted that parental alienation and breaches in agreed Child Arrangement Orders was a theme that was coming through.
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(3) Changing issues

- a) Media/Political Narrative: The media/political continues to be all focussed on female victims and not on all victims, effectively minimising and erasing awareness and the voice of male and LGBT+ victims. It has regressed ten years to some sort of default position. This was

seen as a 'blip' when the lockdown started (as seen by media reports on call figures on 6th April) but has become the norm. The issue has been that offers of support have been made. Evidence includes:

- Announcement by Government on its excellent #YouAreNotAlone campaign* featured a quote just about female victims (offers are made by ManKind to be included) when it could have been 360⁰ – it is hoped this was a one off.
- Home Affairs Select Committee did not feature any organisation supporting male or LGBT+ victims (an offer had been made to appear). Victims Commissioner mentioned male victims.
- Sky News ran a feature on Saturday just featuring a female DA narrative (offer had been to appear)
- The media also covered the story about the number of women who had sadly been killed through domestic homicides (no men have been reported as the same), however, that is obviously acceptable and expected coverage given this has been an issue particularly for female victims.

* Of note, this has been the ManKind Initiative's slogan for a decade

- b) No recourse: The charity had a call from a male victim and it is important the narrative on no recourse includes male victims.

(4) Similar issues: The past week has seen a continuation of similar issues raised in the last two weeks:

- a) Male victims, like female victims, are at higher risk as many are now stuck indoors with their abuser. They are therefore more easily controlled through violence, psychological abuse and isolation. It is harder for those men to seek a safe space to reach out for help.
- b) Custody and Child Arrangement Orders: A number of fathers are now contacting the charity stating that their exes (mothers) are using the Covid-19 lockdown as a reason to breach agreed Child Arrangement Orders awarded as part of shared parenting. This is despite the fact that the Government has issued guidance to state that the lockdown should not be used as a reason to breach Child Arrangement Orders unless through mutual agreement. One practitioner also said that a number of his clients were complaining of this and there have been media reports (Guardian 7 April) of lawyers "inundated by divorced parents arguing over lockdown custody."

The charity believes this is a form of domestic abuse as it is form of controlling behaviour, psychological/emotional abuse and also financial abuse (a parent may have to go back to the family courts to ensure the Child Arrangements Order is upheld).

- Counselling: We have had a number of men contacting the charity because their appointments with counsellors or other forms of support have been cancelled and they want someone to talk to.