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

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

### Briefing (3): 27th April to 3rd May 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 since 30<sup>th</sup> March 2020 remain 35% higher than normal (pre-lockdown). The helpline is at capacity.
- b) Visitors to the ManKind Initiative website through April were 76% higher than normal (pre-lockdown). This is accelerating as the last week (27<sup>th</sup> April to 3<sup>rd</sup> May) visitors to the website were three times higher than normal (189% increase).

The top five website pages were:

- Types of domestic abuse
- Statistics and Research
- Survivors' Stories
- Is a man you know a victim? Spotting the Signs
- Statistics on Male Victims of Domestic Abuse

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#### (2) Refuge/Safe Houses

- a) Of 34 organisations who have refuges/safe houses who were contacted on 27 April 2020, only five had spaces. This is a similar position to previous weeks.
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### (3) Experiences from practitioners

- a) The charity regularly speaks to organisations and practitioners. Over the past week, two in different parts of the country have experienced a steady increase in the numbers calling the local helpline increase. One has a webchat service and that has increased.
- b) In terms of service provision one reported that the police were still supportive but finding housing support was becoming more difficult
- c) The issue of parenting arrangements and parental alienation continues to be a problem including the breach of Child Arrangement Orders

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### (3) Changing issues

#### Media/Political Narrative:

The media narrative has improved this week with the BBC referring to male victims (or at least including their statistics).

#### Political Narrative

This week has been mixed.

The Home Affairs only referenced men once in its report (Men's Advice Line) and focussed on everyone bar male victims. This was no surprise given the committee had showed no interest whatsoever in male victims (no witnesses were called representing male victims) albeit ManKind had submitted evidence to the Committee. This mean the reporting from the Committee in the national media was skewed as there were no references to be made. This was a deliberate deletion/erasure of male victims.

The Parliamentary Debate on Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> April was better with some MP's mentioning male victims and/or stating that the Bill must represent all victims equally. Philip Davies MP, particular focussed on male and LGBT+ victims. Many other MP's though, still steadfastly refused to acknowledge male victims. Labour's Shadow Spokesperson mentioned the need for more funding for male victims charities on Radio4 Today's programme which was welcome. The charity had submitted [this briefing](#).

The Minister (Robert Jenrick) in his briefing on Saturday 2 May mentioned male victims.

The charity were contacted about a male victim who it had been alleged was murdered by his [female partner](#) earlier in April.

## Service Provision News

The partnership between Boots and Hestia/UKSAYSNOMORE was very welcome and a major step forward.

Phoenix Women's Aid opened a refuge for male victims of domestic in Doncaster.

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### **(4) Similar issues:**

The past week has seen a continuation of similar issues raised in lockdown 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).

- c) 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.

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