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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 (4): 4th May to May 10th 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 30th March 2020 remain 35% higher than normal (pre-lockdown). The helpline is at capacity.
- b) Whilst visitors to the ManKind Initiative website through April were 76% higher than normal (pre-lockdown), May is now seeing this accelerate sharply. Visitors are now 175% higher (in laymen's terms: two and three quarters higher than normal) than in the pre-Covid-19 period.

The top five website pages (bar the home page) 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

(2) Refuge/Safe Houses

- a) Of 34 organisations who have refuges/safe houses who were contacted on 4 May, only six still 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. This week three stated that the level of referrals were about the same as pre-Covid but will be likely because men not being in the system or coming forward.
- 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

(3) Changing issues

Media/Political Narrative:

The media narrative has improved this week more mentions of male victims and more police forces were issuing male specific tweets.

On one national conference call, a well-known figure denigrated the sentence given to a high profile female perpetrator of domestic abuse as being too high because such a sentence would not have been given to a male perpetrator. Wrong on so many levels (factually and morally) but highlights that animosity still exists against male victims.

Service Provision News

There has been more funding for refuges and support services, it was vital that organisations bid for funds to support men and their children in their communities including in refuges/safe houses.

(4) Similar issues:

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

- 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 still 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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