

Written Evidence submitted by Dr Benjamin A. Hine CPsychol FHEA

Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the University of West London

Executive Summary

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy 2021-2024: call for evidence

- 1) I am a senior lecturer in Psychology at the University of West London. I have been researching domestic violence towards men, specifically perceptions thereof, for the past four years. Within this work, I have principally explored how individuals judge domestically violent acts towards men, and how social perceptions around gender and domestic abuse itself affect such judgements. More recently I have led work with service providers who support men to understand their and abused men's experiences, as well as engaging in large scale reviews of client data of both men and women who engage with services designed for 'high risk' individuals¹. I have also led case review work in conjunction with the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) on the case characteristics and outcomes of men reporting rape and serious sexual violence within London.
- 2) In my recent work examining client data, several important comparisons between male and female clients have emerged which further existing calls for gender inclusive approaches to domestic violence support. These include observations that male clients appear to have poorer outcomes when engaging with specialist services within the UK, as compared to women, and that they have gender-specific support needs. Such themes are supported by my other work with service providers for male domestic abuse survivors, and in my work examining the case trajectories of cases involving male victims of rape. **Importantly, all of the work I have conducted or been involved with emphasises the powerful role of gender stereotypes and norms in men's experiences of abuse and subsequent help-seeking.**
- 3) My submission to the consultation in response to the Call for Evidence will detail the findings of my research over the past several years, and provide comment on how public policy must change in order to meet the needs of male victims of intimate violence. I will argue that there is a desperate need to ensure that upcoming strategy and policy frameworks and documentation must be constructed in a way that is **inclusive** to all genders and sexualities, ensuring there is appropriate support based on risk and need. I, like many colleagues, believe that current evidence bodies suggest that domestic abuse is **not a gendered crime**, but instead a crime heavily influenced by gender. As such, men and boys deserve a dedicated strategy, outside of the VAWG framework, to ensure that they are appropriately supported.

¹ Please find a list of my available work [here](#)

Relevant Evidence

- 4) Work from both a book chapter published in 2019² and an article published in early 2020³ demonstrate that widely acknowledged stereotypes relating to both gender and domestic violence influence perceptions of male and female victims of domestic abuse. Critically, participants in these studies judged abuse towards male victims to be less serious and were more reluctant to label men as victims and women as perpetrators, even when information was presented to the contrary. **It was argued in both of these publications that such judgements are a function of narratives, partly perpetuated by political policy, which seek to frame domestic violence as something unidirectionally perpetrated by men, towards women.** It was further highlighted that such attitudes, and the associated judgements, are likely to impact and influence men's recognition of their abuse, their decisions to seek help, and reactions to seeking support by family, friends, services, and other professionals (i.e., those in the criminal justice system).
- 5) In a further publication from 2020⁴, work with call handlers working for a charity supporting male victims of domestic abuse provided more direct evidence for the impact of such stereotypes. In this interview study, several themes were drawn from the testimony of practitioners. For example, they spoke about the wide range and severe impact of abuse suffered by male callers, including physical, emotional, verbal, financial and sexual abuse, and manipulation of parent-child relationships. They also spoke about the substantial barriers that abused men face in both recognising and reporting their abuse, and the challenges of supporting abused men relating to a lack of funding and limited public awareness. **All themes were underpinned by the larger theme of the impact of negative stereotypes and expectations of men,** which prevented men from recognising their abuse, led them to experience crippling shame, to feel embarrassed and confused, to believe that support wasn't available to them, and that no one could help them.
- 6) In work currently under review⁵, call data from the same charity highlighted the specific needs and risk factors of male callers, which both highlighted their similarity and disparity with female victims of abuse. For example, male callers reported experiencing a wide range of abuse, with most reporting emotionally abusive behaviours. Moreover, emotional support and signposting were the most frequent needs, suggesting that male victims required both emotional and practical advice. Both of these suggest that men, like women, are simply victims of abusive behaviour who require help. However, other information, like the requirement by callers that the helpline be anonymous, and that they struggled to get through to the helpline suggest **that men perhaps have more gender-specific needs relating to the shame and embarrassment they feel, and that they may experience more barriers due to chronically underfunded provision for men; both of which are heavily linked to**

² Hine, B. A. (2019). "It can't be that bad, I mean, he's a guy": Exploring judgements towards domestic abuse scenarios varied by perpetrator and victim gender, and abuse type. In E. A. Bates & J. C. Taylor (Eds.) *Intimate Partner Violence: New Perspectives in Research and Practice* (pp. 43-57). London, UK: Routledge

³ Hine, B. A., Noku, L., Bates, E., & Jayes, K. (2020). But, who is the victim here? Exploring judgements towards hypothetical bidirectional domestic violence scenarios. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. 10.1177/0886260520917508

⁴ Hine, B. A., Bates, E. A., & Wallace, S. (2020). "I Have Guys Call Me and Say 'I Can't Be the Victim of Domestic Abuse'": Exploring the Experiences of Telephone Support Providers for Male Victims of Domestic Violence and Abuse. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 0886260520944551.

⁵ Hine, B. A., Wallace, S., & Bates, E. A. (2020). Understanding the Profile and Needs of Abused Men: Exploring Call Data from a Male Domestic Violence Charity in the United Kingdom. *Submitted for publication in Journal of Interpersonal Violence*.

the stereotypes outlined above which characterise men as individuals who cannot be victimised.

- 7) Further work under review^{6,7} details larger-scale case review work of high-risk clients which further strengthens evidence for the gender-specific needs and risk factors of both male and female victims of abuse, which accounts for the impact of stereotypes on experiences of abuse and help-seeking. For example, upon presentation to services, men and women had similar referral routes, but men were more likely to have a disability of some kind and women were more likely to have children living/visiting the home. Men were more likely to report physical abuse than women, whilst women were more likely to report sexual abuse and harassment/stalking. There were no significant differences in the frequency of reporting jealous/controlling behaviours. Results also showed that women were more likely to have attempted to leave, and to call the police, with men more likely to suffer from alcohol/drug problems and reporting poorer physical health. Upon exit from services, men were more likely to be still living with their abuser (twice as many men as women), and for those not living together men were more likely to report ongoing contact. Women were found to have significantly higher reported rates of improved quality of life and overall safety. **In this manuscript it is thus strongly recommended that a base service provision should be available to all victims, with gender-inclusive provision available as required.**
- 8) These messages are mirrored in case review work on male victims of sexual violence, published in 2020⁸. This study, analysing cases of rape involving male victims reported in London between 2005 and 2012 generated a case profile for male cases which suggests several unique characteristics to male cases (i.e., the higher percentage of stranger cases as compared to female cases). Male cases also had a different distribution of outcomes to previous reviews of female cases, with men less likely to withdraw, and more likely to receive ‘no crime’ or ‘no further action’ outcomes. It was argued in this paper that **there appear to be several gender-specific case characteristics that current training and policy may fail to account for.**
- 9) Across this body of work, one thing appears clear. **There exist pervasive and damaging stereotypes about men and male victims which contribute to their invisibility in both the domestic and sexual violence landscape; academic, political, societal, or otherwise.** Critically, such stereotypes appear to affect men’s experiences and recognition of their abuse, their help-seeking, the accessibility of support, and the quality of service provision.

⁶ Hine, B. A., Bates, E. A., Mackay, J., & Graham-Kevan, N. (2020). Comparing abuse profiles, contexts and outcomes of help-seeking heterosexual male and female victims of domestic violence: Part I – Who presents to specialist services? *Manuscript submitted for publication in Partner Abuse*

⁷ Hine, B. A., Bates, E. A., Graham-Kevan, N., & Mackay, J. (2020). Comparing abuse profiles, contexts and outcomes of help-seeking heterosexual male and female victims of domestic violence: Part II – Exit from specialist services. *Manuscript submitted for publication in Partner Abuse*

⁸ Hine, B. A., Murphy, A. D., Yesberg, J. A., Wunsch, D., Charleton, B., & Widanaralalage Don, B. K. (2020). Mapping the landscape of male-on-male rape in London: an analysis of cases involving male victims reported between 2005 and 2012. *Police Practice and Research*, 1-18.

Issues with including men and boys under VAWG Strategy

- 10) In several of the publications outlined above, it is argued that government policy is at the heart of the issue, and that the very structure of the strategic frameworks in this area formally perpetuate damaging stereotypes which disadvantage male victims. Some of the issues are outlined below.
- 11) First, it is **fundamentally illogical to include men under this strategy**, as they are not women and girls. Doing so simply erases men and boys as potential victims of the crimes covered under this strategy and occludes them from any meaningful recognition.
- 12) Second, defining and framing domestic violence as a gendered crime, as this strategy does, ignores a wide range of academic studies and governmentally endorsed Office For National Statistics figures **which suggest that approximately 1 in 3 victims of domestic violence are men**. Moreover, it suggests that gender is the reason that women become the victims of domestic or sexual violence when, whilst gender is one important factor, it is not the sole reason for victimisation. Indeed, a wide range of research suggests that perpetration of intimate partner violence is more accurately predicted by factors relating to emotional regulation and control, than gender.
- 13) Third, and as a result of the framing described above, the current VAWG strategy exacerbates and potentially creates barriers to service engagement by abused men in a variety of ways. First, it does not adequately apportion funding to services which seek to support men in a gender-inclusive manner, partly as a result of the lack of recognition afforded to men by the definitions utilised. Second, it suggests that such services are not required in the first instance. Third, it suggests that when services are available, that men should not, or should not need to access them. Fourth, it results in services working with men to fail to overly advertise or ‘push’ their services for men. Fifth, when services engage with men, they frequently perceive men as less ‘at risk’, as they are not the ‘typical’ or ‘overwhelming majority’ or victims of crimes covered under this strategy.
- 14) Taken together, the case for men and boys, including those in the LGBTQIA+ community, to be included in this strategy appears weak, and **results in diminished support and provision for men and boys, leaving them vulnerable and in many cases, at great, ongoing risk**.

Recommendations

- 15) My principal recommendation is simple; a parallel strategy for men and boys is desperately needed. Put simply, I fully support the VAWG strategy, and the work this has done to help women escape from many kinds of abuse. However, I feel there should be a parallel strategy for ending abuse against men and boys, rather than having male victims exist inappropriately within the current VAWG strategy. **Having a dedicated Intimate Violence Against Men and Boys (IVAMB) strategy would allow for a truly gender inclusive approach, which focuses on adequately acknowledging addressing the needs and vulnerabilities of male victims of domestic and sexual abuse, stalking and harassment, and honour-based violence**. Importantly, such a strategy would not only allow for true, and much needed

recognition of male victims, but for the equitable distribution of dedicated funding for gender-inclusive services specifically designed around the needs of men, and the various factors which shape their experiences. Moreover, by ‘leading from the front’, the recognition of male victims with governmental policy would surely help re-shape societal and sector-wide narratives around domestic violence as something that can affect anyone, and that those afflicted deserve both recognition and support.

- 16) My second recommendation relates to training and practitioner engagement. Put simply, any training provided to or by services should appropriately cover existing evidence on the gender-specific vulnerabilities and needs of male victims, including that relating to the influence of stereotypes, attitudes around masculinity, abuse risks (e.g., use of children as a form of coercive control), and negative coping behaviours (e.g., substance use and misuse). There are an increasing amount of academic publications and a wealth of practitioner knowledge regarding these needs, and it is critical that these are utilised to generate effective training for all groups that have the potential to interact with abused men⁹.

Dr Benjamin A. Hine CPsychol FHEA

19th February 2021

⁹ The recently developed Male Victims Service standards developed by ManKind Initiative and Hestia provide an excellent framework to govern good practice and training within this sector. These standards are informed by the experiences of victim/survivors, practitioners and the current research.