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

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## Letter to

The Home Secretary, The Rt Hon Priti Patel MP;  
Lord Chancellor, The Rt Hon Robert Buckland QC MP;  
Attorney General, The Rt Hon Michael Ellis QC MP.

19 March 2021

Dear Home Secretary, Lord Chancellor and Attorney General

### **Re: Domestic Homicides (Letter from Victims' Commissioner and Domestic Abuse Commissioner) - Male Victims**

I am writing on behalf of the ManKind Initiative, the leading UK charity specialising in supporting male victims of domestic abuse, which includes 750,000 men who are victims annually.

We believe there should not be a competition between female and male victims of domestic abuse. We take a very inclusive of domestic abuse so we want better support, funding and outcomes for all victims, therefore the comments below should be taken in that context.

We are writing to support the letter that was sent by **Victims' Commissioner and Domestic Abuse Commissioner** (8 March 2021) about the above with regard to a:

- review into domestic homicides including all of the factors they refer to including involving experts in the field (we, and a range of academics, who are expert on male victims can support where appropriate).
- comparison between sentences for domestic homicides compared to non-domestic homicides (both murder and manslaughter convictions), which should be disaggregated by gender and other protected characteristics.

However, we would urge the Government to ensure any such review or comparison includes male victims of domestic homicides. The latest ONS figures show that over a three year period (April 2016 to March 2019), 88 men were killed in domestic homicides (38 by a partner or ex-partner)<sup>1</sup>.

With respect to the letter that you received, whilst the Commissioners primarily refer to female victims, we are also concerned about how gender stereotypes involving male victims are treated within the criminal justice system.

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<sup>1</sup> Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2020 - <https://bit.ly/2WQ4JZ8> (Table 23)

That concern is also focused on low sentences given to female perpetrators of domestic abuse, outdated views that judges have about the level of risk and harm that men can bear, and, also the lack of support and recognition of male victims within public services.

Furthermore, research has been conducted by Dr. Elizabeth Bates (University of Cumbria) which is awaiting publication reviews over 20 Domestic Homicide Reviews inclusive of male victims of partner abuse. This research shows the level of missed opportunities by the public services (especially GPs) because they did not adequately recognise men as victims of domestic abuse. It is heartbreaking to read.

We would also like to refer to research commissioned by the Magistrates Association and conducted by the University's of Durham and Sunderland. This was entitled "*The Training Needs of Magistrates in relation to Domestic Abuse (2018)*"<sup>2</sup> and was published in 2020. It showed that magistrates viewed the level of risk and harm with respect to violence within a domestic abuse setting to be lower for men when carried out by a woman and that they viewed women to be at higher risk of harm when it was carried out by a man.

Level of risk and harm if violence occurs (P – Perpetrator and V – Victim)	% recognised as high risk	% recognised as high harm
Male P and Female V	76%	81%
Male P and Male V	56%	73%
Female P and Female P	47%	65%
Female P and Male V	45%	67%

This we believe impacts the level of sentence that female perpetrators of domestic abuse receive, as can be show by ONS figures<sup>3</sup>:

- Of those sentenced for breaching non-molestation orders, 5% of women received an immediate custodial sentence whilst 15% of men did.
- The average sentence for a woman for this breach was 2.9 months and for a man it was 4.4 months

The Commissioners rightly bring up the length of sentence for Anthony Williams and we would wholeheartedly agree that the sentence is too low. We believe though this is not an issue just affecting female victims of domestic abuse, we believe it to be the case for male victims killed by their current or ex-partners too albeit it may well be for different reasons. Therefore we would ask that any review should include all genders of the victims and their perpetrators. Nearly all women who kill their partners/ex-partners use weapons and this can be seen by the research produced by Dr Elizabeth Bates referenced earlier.

<sup>2</sup> The Training Needs of Magistrates in Relation to Domestic Violence and Abuse (published by The Magistrates Association, September 2020): <https://bit.ly/3rZqflz>

<sup>3</sup> ONS: Domestic abuse and the criminal justice system, England and Wales: November 2019 <https://bit.ly/2QolnMw> (Table 17) and ONS: Domestic abuse and the criminal justice system, England and Wales: November 2019 <https://bit.ly/2QolnMw> (Table 19).

For example, Sarah Lewis killed Paul Lavelle from Liverpool with a broken dinner plate in May 2017 and was sentenced in January 2018 to seven and a half years in prison after pleading guilty to manslaughter. Mr Lavelle's mother has just been told she is leaving prison next month (April) – less than four years after her son was killed which highlights the clear impact of such a low sentence.

### Self-defense

The Commissioners state that they “*are also concerned that self-defense, which is often the reality of where a woman kills their abuser*”. We find this statement of serious concern as there is no evidence that this is “*often the reality*”.

It is a serious concern if this unjustifiable narrative gains a foothold in the minds of the Government or wider society as the standard and normal reason and explanation why a woman kills her current or ex-partner. To do so, will mean it becomes more difficult for men and their families to receive justice for the crimes that have occurred.

It will make it less likely that cases are brought, convictions to be made and appropriate sentences to be given.

One of the narratives male victims face and regularly tell us through our helpline is when they come forward to seek help, a response can often be “*what did you do to make her do it*”. This false self-defense narrative legitimises and reinforces that barrier that male victims already face.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this letter and the points made, and of course, please do not hesitate to contact me if you or your officials wish to discuss any matters further.

Yours sincerely,

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