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Domestic Violence and Abuse Act 10 Recommendations for Change

(1) Background

About the charity: The charity was the first in Great Britain to support male victims of domestic abuse and through its experience with victims and through working with professional, academics, charities, it takes a gender inclusive approach to domestic abuse – wanting to ensure that gender responsive support is available for individual male and female victims based on individual need and risk.

The charity operates a national helpline (1,500 calls per year), website (60,000 unique users per year) and IDVA drop-in service. It also supports the male victim domestic abuse sector through its CPD accredited training, a national directory of male victim services, membership of a number of national stakeholder committees and its annual national conference. The charity also works with a range of academics and survivors. Lastly, the charity also advocates and campaigns on behalf of male victims (including an award winning video #violenceisviolence) – but importantly not in competition with female victims – **it wants better support for all victims.**

All of the charity's staff are female, the majority of trustees are female and also our IDVA is female.

Government support: The charity has been supportive of the changes made by the Government to domestic abuse policy and has taken part in the Government consultations in that respect. This includes the introduction of Domestic Violence Protection Orders, the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme and also making Controlling and Coercive behavior a specific criminal offence. It also supports the funding of refuges/safe houses, the funding for transforming domestic services and a range of other initiatives including support the network of IDVA/ISVAs, strengthening stalking laws and also the Government's work on forced marriage/honour based crime. All of these issues affect male and female victims of domestic abuse. The charity firmly does not support taking resources away from female victims and giving them to male victims – we want more funding for all.

Recommendations: These top line recommendations have been put together through the charity's experiences but also we have consulted with a number of charities (including the male victims of sexual abuse/violence sector for Recommendation 1), academics and professionals that support victims of domestic abuse – many who support and work with female victims as well as male victims.

(A) Public Policy Changes

Recommendation 1: The Government should create a parallel EAWG strategy entitled “Ending Intimate Violence against Men and Boys”.

Recommendation 2: The Government must ensure the full inclusion and recognition of male victims of domestic abuse/violence and relevant ‘VAWG’ crimes in the implementation, explanation and application of the Istanbul Convention.

Recommendation 3: To consider disaggregating adult family violence (AFV) from the Government definition of domestic abuse and that it has a separate crime category of its own. Alternatively separate AFV with Intimate Partner Abuse/Violence.

(B) Public Policy Implementation Changes

Recommendation 4: Ensuring compliance by statutory authorities with the National Standards of Expectations, including through its national VAWG funding programme, will mean there are adequately funded local services supporting male victims of domestic abuse (and their children) throughout the country. This also includes adequately funded and geographically spread emergency accommodation (refuges/safe house).

Recommendation 5: The Home Office funds research into why sufficient numbers of male victims of domestic abuse are not being assessed as high risk or being risk assessed at all. This research should be conducted by academics with expertise in recognising and studying male victims and female perpetrators.

Recommendation 6: To ensure that all Government campaigns on Sex and Relationship Education are fully gender inclusive thereby ensuring both all boys and girls fully understand what respectful relationships are – that committing partner abuse is wrong whether committed by a man or a woman. This also includes in same-sex relationships.

Recommendation 7: To ensure all statutory authorities and their staff in their training, actions and professional judgment fully recognise male victims of domestic abuse in the same way they rightly do female victims.

Recommendation 8: To ensure that on Home Office-led Government domestic abuse stakeholder bodies there is adequate and a broader representation from organisations and academics that represent male victims.

Recommendation 9: To ensure that Government communication campaigns on domestic abuse are gender inclusive thereby ensuring male victims are as equally recognised by policy makers, statutory authorities, employers and wider society as female victims rightly are.

Recommendation 10: The Government (through the Ministry of Justice) issues guidance to magistrates, judges and CAF/CASS officials to ensure continual and willful breach of contact orders, and parental alienation, is a form of domestic abuse.

Recommendation 1:

The Government should create a parallel EAWG strategy entitled “Ending Intimate Violence against Men and Boys”.

- 1 At a national and therefore local level, under the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) umbrella, all victims of crimes such as sexual violence, domestic abuse, sexual abuse, stalking and "honour" based crimes are classed as being victims of VAWG crimes.
- 2 The charity supports the Government's Ending Violence against Women and Girls Strategy (VAWG) and wishes this to continue, for women and girls.
- 3 However, this strategy does not adequately support or recognise male victims of 'VAWG' crimes who are included under this umbrella strategy. Given the growing awareness of 'VAWG' crimes against men and boys, to continue to publicly, politically and statistically classify these male victims as actually being victims of a crime against a woman or girl is incongruous for any known norms of inclusivity, equality and diversity.
4. As an example, whenever it is explained that the footballers who spoke out at the end of 2016 about the crimes of sexual abuse they endured in their early football careers, it is met with incredulity that those crimes are classified by the Government and the Crown Prosecution Service as being a crime against a 'woman and girl'.
- 5 The charity therefore believes that the Government should create a parallel strategy entitled “**Ending Intimate Violence Against Men and Boys**” that sits alongside the “Ending Violence Against Women and Girls”. This would provide the adequate recognition, awareness and support that men suffering from these crimes need.
- 6 By taking a more gender inclusive and responsive approach, the Government has a real opportunity to take a lead on supporting male victims of these 'VAWG' crimes. This approach to intimate violence would improve focus, recognition and support for female and male victims - both in same-sex and heterosexual relationships. It would also help to end the minimisation of male victims of these crimes and the lack of funding available for male victims services without harming the recognition and service provision for female victims.
- 7 In a country such as the United Kingdom, with its diverse population and international national leadership role in terms of inclusion, equality and fairness, the current approach can no longer continue for a number of reasons. By classing male victims of these crimes as being victims of “women and girl's” crimes is:

- factually incorrect as men and boys are not women and girls
 - minimising the lived experience of men and boys who suffer these crimes by making it harder for them to feel that what has happened to them will be recognised, supported and validated. This reinforces their vulnerability and risk.
 - making male victims of these crimes invisible to society, employers, policy makers and service providers* thereby leading to inadequate recognition, awareness and support. This reinforces their vulnerability and increases risk especially at the point of self-recognition and disclosure.
 - preventing the creation of nuanced and gender responsive services and solutions for male victims as they are not recognised as having any different needs or experiences than female victims of these crimes.
 - ensuring the continuation of a low level of resources within communities – there are still gaps in many areas of the United Kingdom including a network of refuge/safe houses (there are currently only 110 spaces in the United Kingdom of which 34 are dedicated to men)
- 8 The Crown Prosecution Service’s Domestic Violence Guidance states *“Prosecutors should be aware that there is a significant under-reporting of domestic abuse against male victims”* and that the Government’s Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Equalities stated that *“...men are often reluctant to come forward and report crimes [domestic abuse] of this nature”*. The inclusion of male victims of these crimes in a VAWG strategy will not provide encouragement for men to come forward – when in effect, they do not have ‘official recognition’.
- 9 A classification of Intimate Violence Against Men and Boys would help to illuminate and address the common factors typically shared by male victims of intimate crimes which are not typically shared by female victims of the same crimes, and so are usually overlooked within policies under the VAWG umbrella. These include gender-based stigma and shaming and the impacts of these crimes upon the victim’s masculine gender-identity; widespread public and/or official indifference to crimes of sexual and domestic violence against men, antipathy or even mockery of male victims of intimate crimes; and the prevalence of gender-specific myths about sexual and other intimate crimes.
- 10 For the Government to adopt this approach, it would provide further proof that the United Kingdom is a world leader in tackling this crime for all of its citizens.

* David Edwards’ Domestic Homicide Review (draft)