

Response to Petition PE1307 - The ManKind Initiative

(1) The ManKind Initiative – Background

- 1.1 The charity greatly welcomes the opportunity to respond to the petition and endorses the approach taken by the Scottish Petitions Committee in taking this issue seriously.
- 1.2 The ManKind Initiative (www.mankind.org.uk) is a UK charity (formed in 2001) based in Taunton, England that is dedicated to supporting male victims of domestic abuse. The organisation operates a help-line (700 calls per year including about 7% from Scotland which is on par with population size). The charity employs four part time staff (three women). Funding for the charity (income £50,000 per annum) is very difficult. The services we provide are; information and signposting, emotional support, and training and presentations. The latter has included the Home Office, police forces, local authorities and Victim Support groups. We are a member of the Ministry of Justice's Relationship Breakdown Group.
- 1.3 The charity strongly believes that domestic abuse is a social problem with both female and male victims and we campaign strongly for a non-gendered approach. We do not believe that simply tacking the words "men can be victims too" onto literature and training is sufficient for a non-gendered approach, it should be "men **are** victims too". In addition, the charity has seen a gradual but patchy sea change across the country in the past two years, with some statutory authorities looking to pro-actively support both female and male victims. Partly, this is due to their need to comply with equalities legislation but also due to the increasing numbers of male victims requesting support from them.

(2) Summary

- 2.1 The ManKind Initiative fully endorses both the thrust of Petition PE1307 and the comments made by Alison Waugh and John Forsyth at the Public Petitions Committee hearing. They reflect the approach of the ManKind Initiative and the evidence that the charity experiences in practice.

(3) Research studies by Professor Marianne Hester of Bristol University *Who Does What to Whom?* and study by David Gadd et al *Domestic Abuse Against Men in Scotland*.

- 3.1 The briefing by SPICEe referred to these two research studies. We must point out that we have reservations about their methodological rigour and consider that some of the conclusions in each tend to marginalise both the prevalence and the true plight of male victims of domestic abuse. Although of general interest, we urge that they are not used to unduly influence public policy on this issue. We urge the Scottish Parliament to instead use the 2008-09 Scottish Crime and Justice Survey (SCJS) and the British Crime Survey (specifically [Homicides, Firearm Offences and Intimate Violence 2008/09 - Supplementary Volume 2 to Crime in England and Wales 2008/09](#)).

(4) Answers to specific questions

4.1 What are your views on the issues raised in the petition?

- 4.1.1 The Petition covers the true meaning of gender equality, its practical application and the need to ensure that all victims of domestic abuse have equal access to the support services they need.
- 4.1.2 Equalities policy and legislation is based on ensuring equality between individuals (see clause 8(2) of Equality Act 2006). If a female and a male victim with exactly the same problems and in need of the same help are not equally supported by a statutory authority or agency, this is discriminatory. There may be occasions where they run separate campaigns or training courses for female and male victims, but campaigns and training based on one gender without reciprocal arrangements is not only discriminatory but also fails their duty of care in helping all victims.
- 4.1.3 The charity endorses the campaign by Strathclyde Police for example because it included male victims. This should be compared to the domestic abuse "No Excuse" campaign currently run by Edinburgh Council which inexcusably fails to include male victims.
- 4.1.4 One of the key issues raised by the 2008-09 SCJS (Partner Abuse) is the level of under-reporting by male victims compared to the under-reporting by female victims. The research showed that police

became aware of 35% of incidents against women but only 8% of incidents against men. Part of the cause of this is that the majority of public information campaigns are aimed solely at female victims. Many male callers to the charity's helpline have not contacted local statutory agencies because they find that the leaflets, posters and web-sites these agencies produce present victims as only being female so male victims do not think they will be supported by them.

4.1.5 The charity is alarmed by the gender-based training that is operated throughout Scotland as outlined by John Forsyth during the Committee hearing on 26th January 2010. All domestic abuse training must include training about male victims and it must be made clear that domestic abuse applies to both genders. The deliberate exclusion of statistics about male victims highlighted at the Committee hearing is a clear and real example of discrimination. It also means that trainees are not being trained properly.

4.2 What action would you like to see the Scottish Government take to address the issues around domestic abuse/violence towards men by their partners? What assistance do you need from the Scottish Government to deal with domestic abuse/violence against men by their partners?

4.2.1 The Scottish Government should work at two levels:-

4.2.1.i At a macro level, the Scottish Government must provide the political leadership and initiative needed to publicly and unequivocally state that men **are** victims of domestic abuse too and that it requires all Scottish statutory authorities and agencies to ensure they provide support equitably to both female and male victims. This will not only give confidence to those men suffering but also will give a clear message to Scotland's statutory authorities and agencies that the prevailing gender-based female-centric analysis and service provision is no longer acceptable.

4.2.1.ii At a micro-level, the Scottish Government must ensure that any Government and public funding includes support for victims of both genders. As Government funding is given to organisations such as Women's Aid (who perform an excellent service) then funding must also be given to a service that supports male victims. While it is acknowledged that in an ideal world all domestic abuse organisations that receive funding should support both genders, to give men the confidence to come forward it is more credible that a free-standing, independent organisation for male victims in Scotland should be created and funded. Male victims, just like female victims, feel more comfortable if they know there is a specialist service for them. Funding for such an organisation would be a huge step forward but there do need to be services for men to be referred onto as well.

4.2.2. Based on our experience and expertise, the ManKind Initiative urges the Scottish Government, who recently announced that they are looking to fund a help-line for male victims, to ensure the service is a free-standing and independent service which is not 'tacked' onto an existing service. This service must focus solely on male victims and must not base its work on the current and incorrect gender-based assumptions that prevail within Scotland and the rest of the UK.

4.3 With regards domestic abuse violence against men by both male and female partners do you have any evidence (statistical or otherwise) to show what the trends are in terms of the number of reported cases, likely causes (how do these differ against likely causes of domestic abuse and violence by men against women), geographical spread.

4.3.1 As outlined the clearest evidential base is provided by the 2008/09 Scottish Crime and Justice Survey (SCJS). The figures are similar to those in the 2008/09 British Crime Survey (England and Wales³)-

Percentage of adults experiencing partner abuse	Scotland ^{1 2}	England and Wales ³
in the last 12 months		
- men	5%	4%
- women	5%	6%
Since the age of 16		
- men	15%	10%
- women	21%	21%

^{1,2} Figure 2.2 and Table A1.1 Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2008/09

³ Table 3.01 - Homicides, Firearm Offences and Intimate Violence 2008/09 - Supplementary Volume 2 to Crime in England and Wales 2008/09

4.3.1.i The higher proportions of male victims for the more recent 12-month period reflect a clear trend towards increasing contemporary male victimisation

4.3.2 Other significant statistics from England and Wales (Ministry of Justice) include a large increase in the number of females convicted of domestic abuse: 806 cases in 2004/05 to 2,968 cases in 2008/09. The

charity does not have similar statistics for Scotland. The charity's help-line has seen a 10% increase, year-on-year, in calls.

- 4.3.3 The reason for increasing female convictions is two-fold – greater police awareness and a general increase in female violence (in England and Wales the number of females convicted of violence has increased from 31,000 in 2000 to 88,000 in 2007).
- 4.3.4 In terms of differences in the type of crime, those outlined in the 2008-09 Scottish Crime and Justice Survey (SCJS) are broadly similar to those in England and Wales. Based on calls to the charity's help-line and statistics for England and Wales the differences between the genders are:-
 - 4.3.4.i Serious physical violence - a male perpetrator is more likely to directly strike his female victim, but a female will use a weapon, such as a knife, iron and other object. Poisoning is another difference.
 - 4.3.4.ii Allegations - where a female perpetrator calls the police stating they were the victim, is a common theme on the help-line. 67% of cases to the charity's help-line where the police have become involved have been based on allegations made by the victim's partner which the victim has claimed as being untrue.

4.4 Do you have any evidence that might point to an under reporting of cases of domestic abuse/violence towards men by their partners?

- 4.4.1 The 2008-09 Scottish Crime and Justice Survey (SCJS) estimated that men were four times more likely than women to under-report their last incident to the police. In addition, of the 700 calls the charity receives each year, over one in four are received from mothers/sisters because their son/brother will not seek help himself. This also points to significant under-reporting. Men have suffered for five years on average before they contact the charity
- 4.4.3 Of callers who have contacted the help-line and had previously approached the police, 64% found the police both unsympathetic and were offered no help.

4.5 What is your response to the five steps outlined by the petitioners and to the additional information (PE1307/A) supplied by them?

- 4.5.1 The ManKind Initiative fully endorses the comprehensive steps and additional information supplied by the petitioners. They have shown concern at the plight of male victims of domestic abuse in Scotland and importantly have set out practical and achievable ways that they can be recognised and supported.

4.6 From your experiences, is there anything you would like to add in terms of the impact on children caused by domestic abuse/violence towards men by their partners and whether this impact on children differs (in which case how) from situations of domestic abuse/violence towards women by men?

- 4.6.1 The charity conducts surveys when men call the help-line which acts as an aid to help the man talk. In 2009, of those callers with children 65% reported that their children had witnessed the physical abuse and 87% had witnessed or heard the mental psychological abuse.
- 4.6.2 In addition, callers reported that their female partner had used the children against them. 45% had said their children had been encouraged to ignore/undermine them and 16% had been encouraged by the female partner to actually assault them.
- 4.6.3 There are significant differences in the impact on female and male victims where children are involved:-
 - 4.6.3.i As there are almost no specialist refuges/safe houses specifically for male victims (none in Scotland) there are few appropriate places for an abused father and his children to flee to even if he deemed this to be best for the children. It is generally far harder, therefore, for an abused father to move out of the home with his children than it is for a mother in a similar situation. Father victims generally have no choice, therefore, but to stay within the family home to protect their children from the abusive mother. The abused father will endure the suffering so long as his children are not directly affected.
 - 4.6.3.ii Another difference is that part of the psychological weaponry used by an abusive mother on the abused father is to threaten to remove the children. 65% of callers with children say this threat had been made.
 - 4.6.3.iii The situation for children of abused fathers will not improve, therefore, until sufficient publicly funded emergency accommodation suitable for children, is made available to them

Produced by Mark Brooks, Chairman, The ManKind Initiative.