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SUBMISSION TO CONSULTATION OF THE STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN TO ADDRESS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND TO UPDATE THE WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT'S DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY

(A) Overall Comments

The ManKind Initiative, a charity that supports male victims of domestic abuse across the UK, welcomes the fact that the Welsh Assembly Government is widely consulting on its domestic abuse strategy. The comments from the charity refer to that aspect.

The charity also supports the recognition the Welsh Assembly Government gives to male victims of domestic abuse including funding the Dyn Project. Wales in general is more advanced than England and certainly more advanced than Scotland in looking at how male victims can be supported. The success of the Montgomery Family Crisis Centre in Newtown is testimony to the work that is carried out in Wales. However, there continues to be a lack of refuge space (the Montgomery Centre is often full) for male victims within Wales especially in the main areas (Newport, Cardiff, Swansea and North Wales) and the strategic action plan has to address this.

Overall, the consultation document and the strategy/objectives outlined do not treat male victims (both heterosexual, bisexual and gay) in Wales in the same way as female victims. This is of great concern because the charity believes that all victims of domestic violence must be treated as individuals and have the same access to services and help, according to their need. The gender of a victim is secondary, albeit that the different genders may require different solutions.

The concern is that, as they stand, if the actions/targets are implemented then male victims in Wales will continue to be treated as second class victims. Not only of course is there a danger that this can be construed as sexist but of course it would be in breach of the Gender Equality Duty and Domestic Violence legislation which ensures that all victims have access to services and are treated equally. If a male victim is not treated in the same way as a female victim assuming they are both seeking the same help, then this is discriminatory.

This response will outline where the document, as it currently stands, will not be treating male victims as equals to female victims. If changes are not made then the Welsh Assembly Government will need

to explain why a male victim in Wales should be treated as inferior to a female victim. The charity urges that the Welsh Assembly Government ensures that all domestic violence services and campaigns are available to male victims, or there are sufficient male alternative services.

The charity would like to make clear that we abhor all domestic violence, whether against a female or a male and that we would not wish to see services taken away from female victims, but additional services made available to male victims.

If, at any future time, the charity can be of any assistance to the Welsh Assembly we would welcome the opportunity of meeting Welsh Assembly members or officers to discuss the matter.

Mark Brooks
Chairman
The ManKind Initiative

(B) Introduction

In setting the scene the introduction to the consultation shows that while the broad strategic framework is gender neutral, the application of the framework is not.

At a top level, the reason the charity is making this comment is based on the fact that the introduction makes no reference to male victims (and their children) at all.

The statistics referred to in the document do not highlight the male equivalent. For example, the introduction states that 'women and children suffer disproportionate levels of domestic abuse' and also that 'we also recognise that women are overwhelmingly the victims of violence in the home'.

However, using the figures in the 2007/08 British Crime Survey interpersonal module (quoted in the introduction to the consultation) one in five (20%) men in England and Wales have experienced domestic abuse since the age of 16 and this equates to 3.2 million men. Three in ten (30.2%) women have experienced domestic abuse since the age of 16 and this equates to 4.8 million women. This equates to a gender breakdown of 40% male and 60% female.

In addition, concerns about the use of the word 'overwhelmingly' when referring to female victims of domestic violence has been raised the UK Statistical Authority (<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/reports---correspondence/correspondence/index.html> - correspondence 30th March 2009) in a consultation by the Crown Prosecution Service in 2008/09.

In terms of Welsh statistics, the same BCS report (Table 3.16) states that in Wales, 4.2% of men said they had been a victim of domestic abuse in 2007/08 and 3.1% had been victims of partner abuse.

The equivalent female figures are 5.4% and 4.7% respectively and for partner abuse it shows that 40% of victims are male and 60% female.

While the figures outlined show that there are more female victims than male, the ratio of 60:40 is sufficiently close enough to show that male victims cannot be ignored. The figures show that the bias, in terms of lack of services and recognition, against male victims can no longer continue. It certainly cannot be said that all victims are treated equally.

There are other examples within the introduction where the default position is to only reference female victims and not male, or both. Such areas include:-

- Ongoing support of £8.25 million on supported people funding for women - no reference to any figures for male victims;
- The figures regarding the telephone calls to the Welsh Domestic Abuse Helpline have to be looked at with regard to the high level of under-reporting by male victims themselves and also how the help-line is promoted. That is, whether it is made clear that it is also aimed at men as well as women. This is no slight on Women's Aid who run the help-line but if it is advertised as being "run by Women's Aid" (see Conwy Council - <http://www.conwy.gov.uk/doc.asp?cat=5592&doc=21195> for example) then male victims are unlikely to contact it as they do not think it is for them. It means the help-line figures cannot necessarily be used to portray the difference between male and female victim statistics.

The last point to make on the introduction to the consultation is the politicisation of domestic violence services. The statement 'the Single Equality Scheme and the Equal Pay Campaign are addressing this cultural legacy as they challenge the view of women being second-class citizens...' is a highly political statement. Whatever the arguments for and against this statement, it is important to ensure that both women and men have access to domestic violence services based on need and based on the fact they are individuals. To politicise domestic violence is something that cannot be supported.

(C) Objectives

The sections below briefly outline the concerns that the strategy will not treat male victims in the same way as female victims. Much of the action/targets show bias against male victims by omission. That is, an action/target which should be gender neutral is in fact gender specific without ethical, moral or legal reason, and certainly not in terms of equality.

(D) Prevention, raising Awareness and Protecting Children

(1.5) Action/Target

In addition, to the whole age spectrum, publications should ensure that gender, sexuality and working background are also included.

The ManKind Initiative's help-line receive calls from male victims from all walks of life including those who are in professional services (bankers, accountants) as well as those in manual occupations. It would be of use to the Welsh Assembly Government if a wider dataset was studied including sexuality and employment, and whether children were in the household.

(1.6) Action Target

The ManKind Initiative warmly supports the need to raise awareness about support for male victims.

One of the key themes of the calls that the charity receives is that male victims feel alone, because they are unaware of services available to them and the support they can expect to receive.

Historically, statutory agencies have concentrated on supporting female victims and much of the information available in the public domain is aimed at female victims only. It is vital that male victims know where they can go to receive information and help.

In this regard, we believe that gender-specific campaigns are instigated, or, if a gender-neutral campaign is instigated it should make clear that the service is available to both female and male victims.

For example, a campaign that states "domestic abuse victims, call this number now" should state "female and male domestic abuse victims, call this number now."

The importance of this is to ensure that male victims are aware this service is available to them. It is important because such is the paucity of campaigns that mention men (normally they are just for women), men naturally assume it is not for them unless it is clearly stated.

(1.7) Action Target

Updated guidance must include information about male victims. Often, information in this setting is aimed at ensuring men do not commit domestic abuse against females, without mention that the reverse situation is also unacceptable.

To fail to make sure this balance is achieved is unequal and discriminatory especially as it is important to ensure that females do not commit domestic abuse against males.

(1.9) Action/Target

The ManKind Initiative warmly supports the need to raise awareness about support for victims in the LGBT community.

(1.10) Action/Target

The Domestic Abuse Resource Pack should also minimise risk to men (and their children) associated with contact arrangements within family court proceedings, as it does for women and children.

The Domestic Abuse Resource Pack must be gender neutral, if it is not then by its very nature it is not equal and if the guidance does not include such support for men, then it is discriminatory. If a male victim is not supported in the same way as a female victim, then CAFCASS CYMRU would be acting in a discriminatory manner.

(E) Prevention, Raising Awareness and Protecting Children

(2.2) Action/Target

As referenced, this should also include men and families if equality of treatment and access to services is to be achieved.

(2.5) Action/Target

The Gender Equality Duty (GED) applies to both men and women. Provisions within the GED make clear that services provided by statutory agencies must meet the needs of both men and women within their communities.

To state that public authorities in Wales should understand the GED and how it relates to the provision of services for domestic abuse and violence solely against women is discriminatory. It is in itself a breach of the GED.

(2.8) Action/Target

Service Level Agreements must also include ensuring key service delivery agencies are supporting male victims within their operational remit.

(F) Improving the Response of Criminal Justice Agencies

(3.3) Action/Target

Of all the areas that the ManKind Initiative is concerned with, this is one of the most important.

The CPS is gender-neutral in the way that it applies the law, as it should be.

It is therefore vital that the provision of all Wales data relating to charging, prosecutions and convictions for domestic abuse and violence is collected for both female and male victims. To fail to do so is discriminatory.

Indeed, without this data, the Welsh Assembly will not be able to meet its requirements under the GED as it will not be collecting the data for male victims of domestic abuse. The Welsh Assembly would not be able to meet the needs of male victims without this data.

To fail to collect this data on male victims is discriminatory.

(3.4) Action/Target

The charity, of course, welcomes publicity campaigns but as outlined in the comments made under 1.6 Action/Target publicity campaigns must also ensure that they are aimed at male victims as well as female victims.

If only female victims are included, it reinforces the impression that male victims are not being treated equally and that there are no services available to them.

With regard to the sporting events, evidence from Scotland shows that in fact there was an increase in male victims of domestic abuse around sporting events (<http://www.heraldscotland.com/old-firm-link-to-rise-in-male-domestic-abuse-1.909420>).

There is no proven link between sporting events and an increase in female victims so any campaign surrounding a sporting event must ensure it is aimed at both female and male victims.

(3.5) Action/Target

Similar to the points made under 3.3 Action/Target, the ManKind Initiative does not understand why agreeing a standard reporting procedure for domestic abuse/violence against women should not also apply to men.

Domestic abuse is a gender-neutral crime governed by gender-neutral legislation, so there is no reason, certainly not one based on equality, where such a reporting procedure should not apply to male victims as well. Failure to do so is discriminatory.

(3.6) Action/Target

Figures from a wide variety of agencies show that whilst male victims of forced marriage are in the minority, they do exist and therefore front line criminal justice agencies must ensure that male victims are supported in the same way as female victims.

Guidance from the Department of Children, Schools and Families outlined at (<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-RR128.pdf>) states that the figure is 20% whilst included in the report, the Karma Nirvana charity estimate it is 43%. It is therefore vital to ensure that in scoping the need and delivery of forced marriage training it must include male victims of forced marriage. To fail to do so is discriminatory.

(G) Improving the Response of Health Services and Other Agencies

(4.1) Action/Target

In keeping with the theme of equality - publicity material, internal domestic abuse policies and improving information sharing should all include support for male victims to help improve the response of the Health Service.

Measuring the support of the health service towards male victims is vital.

(4.2) Action/Target

This must also apply to male victims.

(4.3) Action/Target

This must also apply to the identification of male victims and female perpetrators. This information must be gender neutral.

(H) Supporting and Monitoring Delivery of the Strategy including Performance Framework and Research and Evaluation

(5.1) Action/Target

Monitoring of all domestic abuse projects must also include monitoring the support given to male victims

(5.2) Action/Target

As outlined in the comments in 1.7 Action/Target, such preventive work undertaken with children must apply to victims of both genders.

The charity received a complaint earlier this year from a female pupil in North Wales who said the information and guidance given by her school was only about female victims/male perpetrators which she felt was discriminatory.

(5.4) Action/Target

The national information hub must include information on male victims.

(5.11) Action/Target

Key performance standards must include performance standard for male victims.

ENDS