

Dear Mr Brooks,

Thank you for your letter to the Mayor dated 14th June 2009 expressing your concern about the GLA Equalities Framework and the issue of justice for male victims of domestic abuse. It has been passed to me for reply.

Both the Mayor's Equalities framework and his draft Violence Against Women Strategy, The Way Forward (published in April 2009 for a 3 month public consultation) address the needs of women reflecting the fact that women are at substantially greater risk of domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence.

In your letter you suggest that the difference between female and male victims is not great enough to warrant a policy where one group is given priority over another. However, the analysis underpinning the Mayor's Violence Against Women strategy would suggest otherwise.

Metropolitan Police monitoring data for last year indicates that the majority of victims of domestic violence are female (82%) and that the overwhelming majority of perpetrators (89%) are male. Whilst we do recognise that it is important to consider research from other sources due to high levels of under-reporting with crimes such as domestic violence, there are a number of limitations with the British Crime Survey (BCS) findings that you highlight in your letter.

Firstly, the high prevalence levels for both men and women reflect a wide definition of both "domestic" and "partner" abuse within the BCS. Someone counts as a "victim" if they have experienced "one or more" incidents-this means that a single threat, push or slap is counted as domestic violence. Such single incidents, whether over a year or a lifetime, do not constitute a "pattern of coercive" control which is the more widely understood definition of intimate partner violence, and it is this which prompts calls to agencies for support and to police for intervention.

When the data is analysed in more detail to take into account frequency, fear and injury the disproportion between women and men as victims reappears. Home Office Research indicates that women are the overwhelming majority of the most heavily abused group. Among people subject to four or more incidents of domestic violence from the perpetrator of the worst incident (since age 16), 89 per cent were women (Home Office Research Study 276, Domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking: Findings from the British Crime Survey).

Furthermore, the BCS does not distinguish between offensive and defensive violence. Yet, research from the US indicates that in around three quarters of the incidents where women use violence against their partners it is in self-defence (Kimmel 2002).

In addition, research was carried out in Scotland to assess the extent and nature of the problem of domestic violence against men. Researchers at Keele University undertook follow up interviews with men who had participated in the Scottish Crime Survey. The main findings were:

-Over one in four of those men identified as victims of domestic violence in the Scottish Crime Survey subsequently claimed not to have experienced this form of victimisation.

-Compared to female victims, the men who identified as victims of domestic violence in the Scottish Crime Survey were less likely to have been repeat victims of assault, to have been seriously injured, and report feeling fearful in their own homes.

-Some of the male victims of domestic violence were also assailants.

-Only a minority of those men referred to as "victims" within the Scottish Crime Survey actually perceived themselves as victims and a significant proportion of the men who took part in the research said they had never experienced threats or force from their partners.

(Scottish Executive Central Research Unit, Crime and Criminal Justice Research Findings No.61)

Monitoring data from the Men's Advice Line (MALE) also shows that a significant number of men calling the MALE helpline initially identify as victims but subsequently change their identification by the end of the call or provide information about the violence in their relationships which strongly suggests that they are either not a victim or in fact are the perpetrator.

I think it is important to consider the British Crime Survey figures in the context of the research outlined above.

Having said that, The Way Forward recognises that men and boys are sometimes victims of crimes such as domestic violence, forced marriage and rape. Although basic BCS figures over-estimate the proportion of men suffering intimate partner violence who need support, it is vital that access to protection and services is there for those who need it. The Mayor's Equalities Framework and The Way Forward will sit alongside existing policies and procedures that provide protection and legal redress for all victims of crime.

The Mayor's approach to violence against women is consistent with International Human Rights standards. The United Nations has called on governments to take "integrated measures to prevent and eliminate violence against women" and last year the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women expressed its concern about the absence of a national strategy to combat all

forms of violence against women and girls in the UK. By launching an integrated pan-London strategy to tackle violence against women the Mayor is leading the way and London will be one of the first global cities to put such a strategy in place.

Thank you once again for contacting the Mayor of London.

Yours sincerely,

Yeliz Osman  
Communities and Intelligence