



MEN AND DOMESTIC ABUSE: A ONE SIDED STORY?

**'As a male victim of abuse you have nowhere to turn.....
I don't think there is any lonelier feeling!!!'**

A shocking picture of prejudice, desperation and injustice emerged from the largest survey of male victims of domestic violence facing child contact problems in Wales and England. Hundreds of men who have suffered at the hands of the mothers of their children have then faced even greater mistreatment, abuse and prejudice from services designed to protect and support victims of domestic violence. Against this backdrop the latest suicide statistics in Wales show that 82% of those who kill themselves are men.

'You can drink yourself to death, become suicidal or depressed, do drugs or become homeless. No one cares. You are a man, not a human being'

Welsh family support charity FNF Both Parents Matter Cymru is today launching its report on the experience of male victims of Domestic Violence. The survey gathered online responses from 226 men across Wales and England who had been victims of domestic abuse while facing child contact problems.

'Our survey shows that 70% of men were unable to meet the criteria for evidence imposed by the UK Government for Legal Aid as a result of domestic violence. That corresponds to just 38% of women in the latest survey by Rights of Women'

said Paul Apreda, National Manager for the charity.

Campaigning organisation 'Rights of Women' with help and support of Welsh Women's Aid and Women's Aid Federation of England have undertaken several surveys of victims of domestic abuse and access to justice following the UK Government's removal of Legal Aid for family and other issues under the LASPO regulations. These surveys have, for understandable reasons, focussed exclusively on the position of female victims. No-one appears to have done the research on male victims until now.

'We were initially delighted at the numbers of men who responded to the survey as the figures were higher than any of the comparable surveys of women. However that soon turned to shock when we read the individual testimonies of the men who told us of the institutionalised sexism they've faced. Of all the powerful comments received perhaps the most chilling was from the man who said simply

'Help me, please help me!'

The inescapable conclusion of the survey is that men face built in systemic sex discrimination from statutory bodies such as the Police, Family Courts and social workers. Perhaps even worse is the clear feeling expressed by the male respondents to the survey that domestic abuse support services are actually prejudiced against men.

‘We are calling for an investigation by the Welsh and UK Governments of the systematic gender prejudice faced by men as victims of domestic abuse. If they are going to do one thing only we ask that they stop the discrimination by DV support services that screen male callers but not female ones to determine whether they are making false allegations. We are writing today to Rhian Bowen-Davies the newly appointed National Adviser to Welsh Government on Ending Violence against Women to ask for her support in bringing about change.’

‘We hope that the evidence of the testimonies of hundreds of male voices will bring challenge policies and procedures that result in huge amounts of suffering and turn men to desperate measures. The Samaritans have linked child contact denial to male suicide, and in Wales we have seen a dramatic rise in that tragic phenomenon particularly among men in their middle years where these issues predominate.’ said Paul Apreda

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Understanding that men can get help and support as a victim of Domestic Violence was predictably less well developed because public policy in Wales emphasizes the traditional gender based image of male perpetrator / female victim. When you tell people what a victim looks like there is a danger that anyone who doesn't fit that picture will find it harder to access help and support. That certainly seems to be the case in Wales.

‘It didn't even occur to me that I could apply on DV grounds as a man.’

There were also issues identified about the stigma men feel about admitting to being a victim at the hands of a woman.

‘If you mention this to anyone people will firstly laugh at you and secondly disbelieve you and thirdly blame you – you as a man must have done something wrong’

That behaviour gets in the way of help seeking solutions even when the issues are very serious

‘I told them when she broke my ribs that I had fallen at work. I don't know why. I did not want to cause trouble because I knew that she would get more angry.’

Those men who overcame the initial self imposed barriers then found the situation compounded by the responses of services designed to support victims.

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‘Help? What help? No-one believes you and you simply find yourself accused and arrested despite being the victim. Disgusting prejudice.’

‘Waste of time: there is no protection for men and if you have kids it’s the worst of all. If you walk away you lose your kids, your home, your money and you’re branded’

The expectations of prejudice were largely borne out in the reality of responses from statutory services.

‘Over a period of nine years I was beaten up by my wife, and then beaten up by the system which listened to her lies and assumed I was guilty.’

Children’s services and the Police attracted the bulk of the critical comments from respondents to the survey.

‘I did not report the matter until the abuse became too much to endure and social services refused to intervene in matters of child access. They fully assisted my former partner.’

The Police were also singled out for criticism

‘Only a madman would risk his life reporting DV to the Police’

‘When I reported my ex-wife had assaulted me to a police officer he just laughed at me and said ‘We wouldn’t take that seriously’. He was totally on my ex’s side and even called me a criminal as she had reported that I made death threats over the phone’.

‘I didn’t know where to turn at the time. I had a police force refuse to listen to me. I tried to kill myself because I couldn’t take it any more, knowing thati lived through abuse but my (then) four year old daughter was and still is living with the vilest woman’

However the most damning criticism was reserved for the DV support services who should have been there to support victims of DV whether male or female.

‘The whole system is designed to support women only. I am suffering everyday and my whole life is ruined because I asked for help. I’m so upset and suicidal my life is a mess. I miss my son. I’ve lost everything. I hate myself!’

‘No support available. Told by Women’s Aid – ‘I must have deserved it’

‘Basically you’re stuffed. Nothing you can do and your ex holds all the cards. Nil contact with kids thanks to lying Social Workers and Women’s Aid.’

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‘No domestic abuse charity in Cardiff offers non-judgemental support. I once visited [NAME OF ORGANISATION REMOVED] and they did not keep my details confidential’

‘[NAME OF MALE DV SUPPORT SERVICE REMOVED] was a disgrace. Anti-male, run by radical feminists who screen men but not women’.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a Welsh charity our recommendations are aimed at Welsh Government and the services provided centrally or through Local Authorities. We will also be sharing our report with all 4 Police forces in Wales – offering our help and support to address the issues raised.

- 1. Ban the 'screening' of callers to DV support services when that applies to one gender only.**
- 2. Fund research into the link between child contact denial and the epidemic of male suicide in Wales in the 35-50 age group.**
- 3. Formally recognise child contact denial as a form of Domestic Violence.**
- 4. Provide funding for services to support parents and grandparents with child contact problems**
- 5. Tackle gender stereotyping of victims of DV by statutory and support services through training and information**

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