



MEN AND BOYS
COALITION

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Rebecca Hilsenrath
Chief Executive
Equalities and Human Rights Commission
Fleetbank House,
2-6 Salisbury Square
London,
EC4Y 8JX

20th June 2019

Dear Ms Hilsenrath

Ref: Domestic Abuse Bill – Position of the Commission: Male Victims of Domestic Abuse

I am writing on behalf of the Men and Boys Coalition, the national umbrella charity for over 80 organisations, academics and charities dealing with male-specific gender issues in the UK.

Following your organisation's briefings and evidence to the Parliamentary Joint Inquiry on the Domestic Abuse Bill and your subsequent briefing to a House of Lords debate (held on 6 June 2019), we are requesting urgent clarification from the Commission on how it views the status and recognition of male victims of domestic abuse (who account for one in three of all victims of domestic abuse). To be clear this also covers men in same-sex relationships and those with children, including of course, daughters.

This is based on your organisation's view that within the Bill, the statutory definition and subsequent guidance on domestic abuse should include "recognition of the disproportionate impact of domestic violence on women and girls within the text of the bill (rather than only in the statutory guidance, as currently proposed)."

The Government's position is different and is far more inclusive and equality-based. That is the definition and guidance should instead be gender neutral – a position that would ensure that all individual victims of domestic abuse would be recognised as having equal status in law, the need for the level of support based on their individual level and need and that all individual victims would have equal recognition.

This is a position that the Men and Boys Coalition supports. We also support a gender-informed approach that mean that support to victims with certain protected characteristics was additionally tailored to their needs above based on both equity and equality. This would rightly take into account the Public Sector Equality Duty.

However, the Commission's position is not inclusive or equalities-based as the effect will be to create a victim hierarchy, not based on the level of need and risk of each individual victim (and their children, including daughters) but on their gender. This would be discriminatory and any public authority making a decision that placed an individual's gender as a higher factor than individual need and risk would be in breach of the Equality Act. In addition, the Commission's position gives a higher status to one group of set of individuals (female victims) with a Protected Characteristic over another (male victims).

On that basis, we would urge the Commission to clarify the following points:

- 1) What impact does the Commission believe their position will have on an individual male victim of domestic abuse (includes those in same-sex relationship and those with children, including of course, daughters.) who are assessed as having exactly the same level of need and risk as woman in the same situation?
- 2) What Equality Impact Assessment, or equality considerations, has the Commission made on their position to the above question?
- 3) In terms of Protected Characteristics, what impact does the Commission believe their position will have on male victims of domestic abuse (includes those in same-sex relationship and those with children, including of course, daughters.) compared to female victims in terms of their Protected Characteristics.
- 4) What Equality Impact Assessment, or equality considerations, has the Commission made on their position to the above question?
- 5) Clarification on whether the Commission believes that a female victim of domestic abuse who is assessed as having the same level of need and risk as a male victim, should have priority over that male victim?
- 6) What charities, academics and other agencies that support male victims of domestic abuse did the Commission consult with before taking up their position? A number of our members are experts in the field of male victims of domestic abuse and related crime and have extensive research on the public policy, societal and structural barriers male victims face.
- 7) Did the Commission take into account both the Crown Prosecution Service and the Home Office position statements on male victims of "Violence Against Women and Girls' crimes) which highlight particular barriers they face including societal and structural recognition/assumptions. This includes male victims of domestic abuse.

It is vital that male victims of domestic abuse have full confidence that from a legal, societal recognition and service provision sense, they are viewed as having equal status to all other victims of domestic abuse. Given your national role in the field of equality, it is vital they have confidence in the Equalities and Human Rights Commission that they believe they have equal status. It is vital therefore that you clearly and unequivocally clarify your position on these urgent matters.

We would respectfully request that the response is signed by yourself rather than a member of your policy team or similar.

Yours sincerely

Ally Fogg

Ally Fogg
Acting Chair, Men and Boys' Coalition

PS. You may wish to view the statement made by one of our members, The ManKind Initiative (a charity supporting male victims of domestic abuse), which sets out their concerns on a gendered definition: <https://www.mankind.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/2-Domestic-Abuse-Bill-Parliamentary-Report-will-have-the-effect-of-treating-male-victims-and-their-children-of-domestic-abuse-as-second-class-1.pdf>