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

30 September 2021

Dear Equalities and Human Rights Commission,

Ref: Draft Strategic Plan consultation: Suggested areas of focus under each priority aim

Please accept this as the submission from the Men and Boys Coalition, a network of over 100 academics, charities and professionals committed to highlighting gender-specific issues affecting the wellbeing of men and boys.

Yours sincerely,

Dan Bell
CEO, Men and Boys Coalition

1) Upholding and effective framework for protecting equality and human rights

There are a wide range of grave and urgent wellbeing issues that disproportionately affect men and boys and that continue to receive little or no action from Government or policy makers. In order to achieve the stated aim of upholding an effective framework protecting equality and human rights, it is crucial that policy focus is applied to these issues of gendered inequality and disadvantage affecting men and boys.. This is of course does not mean that the focus on areas of female disadvantage should not continue, so this should be seen as adding an additional focus, which is currently not there.

The main issues are those outlined below:

- The high male suicide rate

- The challenges faced by boys and men at all stages of education and work including attainment, re-training, redundancy and unemployment
- Men's health (including male cancers), shorter life expectancy, workplace deaths plus the health impact of Covid-19
- The challenges faced by the most marginalised men and boys in society (for instance, homeless men, boys in care and the high rate of male deaths in custody)
- Male victims of violence, including sexual violence
- The challenges faced by men as parents, particularly new fathers and separated fathers
- Male victims and survivors of sexual abuse, rape, sexual exploitation, domestic abuse, forced marriage, honour-based crime, stalking and slavery
- The negative portrayal of men, boys and fathers

One final matter, is that these issues affect women too (as mothers, sisters, partners etc.) and women are concerned (often more than men) about these issues and the impact they see on their partners, sons, fathers and brothers. Resolving the issues boys face today means a better society for all, now and in the future.

Ten Key Facts about Men and Boys' Wellbeing in the UK (produced for International Men's Day)

(1) Prostate Cancer

12,031 men died from prostate cancer in 2017 (33 per day, over one per hour) – the most recent figures available. Up from 11,307 in 2014

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/jan/16/prostate-cancer-deaths-in-uk-hit-record-high-of-over-12000-in-2017>

(2) Suicide

In 2018 with 4,903 men took their own lives (13 per day) in the UK at a rate of 17.2 per 100,000, the highest rate since 2013. Men make up three in every four suicides.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/suicidesintheuk2018registrations>

(3) Covid-19

Men are more likely to die of a cancer or Covid, with mortality for the latter widening for working age adults (Covid mortality rates for working age men are 31 deaths per 100,000 compared with equivalent female death rates of 17 per thousand, respectively).

(4) University Entry

For all years since 2010-11, the majority of undergraduate entrants have been female, standing at 55.7 per cent in 2019-20.

<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/equality-diversity-and-student-characteristics-data/>

In the 2018 Cycle, 196,105 men/boys domiciled in the UK accepted places at university, compared to 263,180 women/girls — a gap of 67,075 and 35%. In 2018, for 17 to 30-year-old English students domiciled who participated in Higher Education, there was a gap of over 30,000. Men: 150,085 (44.1%) and Women: 183,325 (56.6%) (2018).

<https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/ucas-undergraduate-releases/ucas-undergraduate-end-cycle-data-resources>

(5) GCSEs

In 2019, boys have had worse exam results than girls for 30 years. Girls are now 14 per cent more likely than boys to pass their exams in English and maths, with 64 per cent of girls doing so compared to 56 per cent of boys.

In 2019, 62.9% of males received Grade 1-4 (A* to C) GCSE grades whilst 71.7% of women received the same results. Only 54.2% of 16-year-old boys achieved a Grade C/4 English Language GCSE compared to 70.5% girls. 59.9% of boys achieved Grade C/4 in Maths as did 59.2% girls.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-51313438>

<https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/>

(6) Exclusions

Boys have more than three times the number of permanent exclusions, with 6,000 permanent exclusions, at a rate of 0.14 compared to 1,900 for girls in 2018/19 (0.05).

<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/permanent-and-fixed-period-exclusions-in-england>

(7) Rough Sleeping

85% of those who slept rough in 2019 are male (where gender known)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/rough-sleeping-snapshot-in-england-autumn-2019/rough-sleeping-snapshot-in-england-autumn-2019#:~:text=approach%20was%20introduced.->

[,There%20were%204%2C266%20people%20estimated%20to%20be%20sleeping%20rough%20on,or%20141%20%25%20increase%20since%202010.](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/rough-sleeping-snapshot-in-england-autumn-2019#:~:text=approach%20was%20introduced.-,There%20were%204%2C266%20people%20estimated%20to%20be%20sleeping%20rough%20on,or%20141%20%25%20increase%20since%202010.)

(8) Prison

There are around 79,164 people in prison, 96% of whom are male.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/prison-population-figures-2020>

(9) Domestic Abuse

In 2018/19 – 786,000 men (1.6 million women) suffered from Domestic Abuse – one in three victims are male.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwalesoverview/november2019>

(10) Sexual Violence/Abuse

140,000 men were estimated to have been victims of sexual assault in 2017/18 (560,000 women). 12,000 men were raped or victims of attempted rape in 2017/18.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/sexualoffendingcrimesurveyforenglandandwalesappendixtables>

ISSUES TO PRIORITISE

- 1) Upholding rights and equality in health and social care, with a specific focus on ensuring there is an equal focus on male gendered health and social care issues, as there is rightly on women's gendered health and social care issues, through the development of a National Men's Health Strategy in parallel to the National Women's Health Strategy.
- 2) Fairness for children and young people, with a specific focus on boys' lower academic attainment across the education system and lower university attendance.
- 3) Fairness in a changing workplace, with a specific focus on ensuring equality of provision of parental leave and pay for fathers and mothers.

2) Farness for children and young people

Over the past thirty years, there has been a persistent and growing attainment gap between boys and girls in the UK. Yet, there has been little or no political focus on the causes of the gap, or the measures and policies that could be put in place to address it.

While there have, quite correctly, been initiatives looking at gender pay gaps, at FTSE-100 board membership and at encouraging more girls into STEM and apprenticeships, there have been no national initiatives, policies or campaigns on boys educational achievement. This also

includes encouraging boys to enter professions that are have “traditionally” been female-focused, as well as those that have become predominantly female focused at entry-level such as law, medicine (GPs) and teaching.

There is now an overwhelming body of evidence (Annex 1 below) showing that boys are significantly underperforming in education, and that this low attainment, relative to girls and relative to their own potential, comprises a hugely significant failure of educational and social policy. This has significant negative social and economic implications for the individual boys themselves as well as their current and future families and dependents, and for society as a whole.

Many years after first being noticed and acknowledged, the attainment gap continues to worsen every year. The statistics also show that boys’ underachievement is not evenly spread, but is concentrated within social groups that already face unfair discrimination according to class, relative poverty, ethnicity and social marginalisation.

There are individual schools, teachers and colleges who are of course undertaking positive work but this is based on individual teacher or school endeavour rather than a whole system approach. It is urgent that our senior political and administrative figures recognise that action is needed and then show real leadership in implementing constructive action.

This year, however, our concerns over both the gap between boys and girls attainment and the lack of policy or action to address this, have been amplified by an unexplained widening of the attainment gap following results based on teacher assessment.

As a result of the decision to cancel exams due to the pandemic, this and last year’s A Level and GCSE results were decided by teachers’ estimates, through looking at coursework and mock exams over the past year.

The outcome was not just a continuation of the difference in attainment between boys and girls, but a significant and unexplained widening of the gap, in which girls enjoyed much more favourable grading across the board.

As Coalition member and former UCAS head, Mary Curnock Cook OBE, [wrote](#) in an excellent analysis for the Higher Education Policy Institute: “This goes further than the usual concerns about boys’ underachievement in education compared to girls and needs a convincing explanation to eliminate what seems, on the face of it, to indicate systemic bias against boys.”

<https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2021/08/23/systemic-bias-against-boys-unexplained-differences-in-teacher-assessed-grades-between-boys-and-girls-in-this-years-a-level-results/>

This should profoundly worry anyone who is concerned with fairness and equality within the education system. However, bar a few solitary voices, the unexplained widening of the attainment gap following teacher estimates has been met with silence from Government and the education sector. This in itself demands an explanation.

Then, following the announcement of this year's GCSE results, University of Buckingham education expert Prof Smithers [said](#): "Girls have long been ahead in schoolwork, but the tendency has been to explain it away... It would be simpler to just accept they are cleverer."

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/08/11/girls-set-increase-gcse-lead-boys-should-accept-cleverer/>

This is an utterly irresponsible statement by a leading educationalist about a disadvantaged group. What it in fact adds evidence to, are the grave concerns that [bias](#) against boys is [a factor underpinning](#) the lower grades they receive. Once again, there was silence from the education sector in response to Prof Smithers' comments, who appeared to receive no sanction as a result.

https://www.breakingnews.ie/ireland/unconscious-bias-boosted-leaving-cert-results-of-girls-says-report-1180583.html?utm_campaign=article&utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=web

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-31751672>

Educational underachievement is linked to a whole range of social exclusion issues including unemployment, rough sleeping and imprisonment. Boys' engrained educational disadvantage is a profound issue of gendered social disadvantage, that must be a priority for Government and the education sector.

It has come to the point where, if the Equalities and Human Rights Commission fails to include this as a focus within its three year-strategy under the priority aim of 'fairness for children and young people', the EHRC has to explain to the public why it continues to fail to seek to address this area. This is given the impact it has not just on the individuals, their families and communities but also on wider society and the country as a whole.

Annex 1.

(1) Key Stage 2

Girls continue to outperform boys. In 2018, the gender gap at the expected standard in reading, writing and maths was 8 percentage points: 68% of girls reached the expected standard compared to 60% of boys.

The gender gap is 8 percentage points for reading, 1 percentage point for maths, 9 percentage points for grammar, punctuation and spelling and 12 percentage points for writing teacher assessment

Department for Education: [National curriculum assessments at key stage 2 in England, 2018 \(provisional\)](#):

(2) GCSEs

62.3% of males received A*-C grades whilst 71.4% of women received the same results – the equivalent of 261,522 more A-C grades being awarded to women than men.

Joint Council for Qualifications: <https://www.jcq.org.uk/Download/examination-results/gcse/2018/main-results-tables/gcse-full-course-results-summer-2018>

(3) A Levels

More women achieved A*-C grades than men (78.7% grades compared to 75.1%), which meant that females received 76,891 more A*-C grades in total than men, due to a greater number of women taking them.

Joint Council for Qualifications: <https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/a-levels/2018/main-results-tables/a-level-and-as-results-summer-2018>

(4) University

In 2008, the gender gap between British men and women attending British universities was 48,000 (a percentage point gap of 12). In 2017 it had risen to 65,000. Over the decade 520,000 fewer British men had taken places at British universities (a percentage point gap of 14).

UCAS: <https://www.ucas.com/file/138996/download?token=Lb4WNafU>

(5) Apprenticeships

In 2016/17, 54% of apprenticeships starts were started by women (262,820) and 46% by men (228,520).

House of Commons Research Library: <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN06113>

(6) Teachers

In 2017, there were 34,000 male primary school teachers in England, making up 15% of the total (187,000 female primary school teachers)

There are 76,500 male secondary school teachers, making up 37.5% of the total (127,700 female secondary school teachers)

DfE: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/school-workforce-in-england-november-2017>

(7) NEETS

Between January to March 2016, there were 865,000 people aged 16 to 24 classified as NEET in the UK. Of these, 405,000 (47%) were male and 461,000 (53%) were female. They represented 12% of the total population aged 16-24 (11% of males; 13% of females). There are differences in the composition of the male and female populations who are NEET. Most male NEETs (55%) are unemployed, while most female NEETs (66%) are economically inactive, that is, they are not in work and not looking for or available for work

House of Commons Library:

<http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06705/SN06705.pdf>

(8) School exclusions

The permanent exclusion rate for boys (0.15 per cent) was over three times higher than that for girls (0.04 per cent) and the fixed period exclusion rate was almost three times higher (6.91 compared with 2.53 per cent).

DfE:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/726741/text_exc1617.pdf

(9) Suicide

In 2017, there were 4,383 male suicides (75%) and 1,439 among women

BBC: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-45407487>

(10) Student Suicide

There were 213 male student suicides between 2012/13 and 2016/17 compared to 105 female student suicides. This is despite fewer male students. The rate for full time students is 5.0 per 100,000 male students and 1.1 per 100,000 female students.

ONS:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/datasets/estimating-suicide-among-higher-education-students-in-england-and-wales>

ISSUES TO PRIORITISE

- 1) Hold an inquiry into under-performance of boys across school system and in university access gap
- 2) Hold an inquiry into concerns of systemic bias within teacher assessed results and disproportionate rate of school exclusions

- 3) Hold an inquiry into what is being done to ensure schools are male friendly – particularly within the early years sector, which has a 3% male workforce and in which male teachers experience prejudice and suspicion

3) Upholding rights and equality in health and social care

Men live shorter lives than women, have worse health outcomes across a range of non-gender-specific issues and have lower engagement with the healthcare system.

Men's health is also disproportionately impacted by issues of social exclusion. In the UK, women live on average 3.7 years longer than men, however this life expectancy gap between men and women widens with increased poverty. Neither are men an homogenous group, some of those who are hardest-to-reach of all are groups comprised primarily of men. Males in most deprived areas have a 9.1 year shorter life expectancy than males in least deprived areas.

The statistics are stark and entrenched:

On average, more than one in five men is still dying between the ages 16 and 65, and more than two in five before the age of 75 – with death rates amongst men in the poorest areas of the country being even worse.

Heart disease and cancer

- Men are still more likely to die of circulatory disease and cancer.
- 75% of premature deaths from coronary heart disease are male.
- Men have a 37% higher risk of dying from cancer and a 67% higher chance of dying from cancers that affect both men and women (Excluding breast cancer and those cancers that affect either women only or men only).

Obesity

67% of men are overweight or obese.

Diabetes

Middle-aged men are twice as likely to have diabetes as women – and twice as likely not to know they have diabetes.

Suicide

Four in five suicides are by men – suicide is the biggest cause of death for men under 35 and there has been a sharp increase in the rate among men aged 35-64.

Lifestyle

Men are more likely than women to:

- smoke, smoke more cigarettes per day and smoke hand-rolled tobacco
- eat too much salt
- eat too much red and processed meat
- eat too little fruit and too few vegetables
- drink alcohol and drink at hazardous levels. Men are twice as likely to have liver disease.

COVID

COVID has starkly highlighted the health inequalities faced by men. In the early stages of the pandemic, 30% more men (21,600) than women (16,600) died in the UK due to COVID-19. The overall impact has been that “Life expectancy for men in the UK has fallen for the first time since current records began 40 years ago because of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, figures show.

“A boy born between 2018 and 2020 is expected to live until he is 79 years old, down from 79.2 for the period of 2015-17, according to the [Office for National Statistics](#) (ONS).

“Estimates for females are broadly unchanged, with a girl born in 2018-20 likely to live for 82.9 years, the same as in 2015-17.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/sep/23/male-life-expectancy-uk-drops-covid-females>

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/articles/coronaviruscovid19andthedifferenteffectsonmenandwomenintheukmarch2020tofebruary2021/2021-03-10>

Despite these statistics, health services are still not effectively engaging with men. Especially during working age, men remain less likely to:

- attend a general practitioner
- attend a NHS Health Check
- opt for bowel cancer screening
- visit a pharmacy
- take a Chlamydia test
- have a dental check-up.

Three in four suicides are male but only a minority of these men were engaged with mental health services. 67% of men are overweight or obese yet only 10-20% of those on NHS weight-loss programmes are men. Research has suggested a link between men's lower use of primary care and their higher rate of hospital services. 71% of CVD-related deaths under 65 are amongst men and the NHS Health Check programme focuses on circulatory conditions, a major killer of men, yet only 35% of local authorities know how many men they reach with the programme, and within those authorities only 44% of health checks are conducted amongst men.

Sources:

https://www.menshealthforum.org.uk/sites/default/files/pdf/mens_health_manifesto_lr.pdf

This lack of effective engagement by health services with men not only means that men's all-round wellbeing is under-supported by regular health check-ups, it also results in much more serious issues going untreated for longer, sometimes until it is too late.

ISSUES TO PRIORITISE

- 1) Support calls for the Government to launch a National Men's Health Strategy in parallel with the planned National Women's Health Strategy
- 2) Assess whether local authority and public health programmes to tackle obesity, reduce smoking and reduce harmful drinking are as readily accessible for men as for women and tailored to reflect what works with men.
- 3) Ensure research funding is distributed equitably between male and female-specific health issues. Of Medical Research Council funding of sex-specific research, just 27% goes to studies researching men.

4) Fairness in a changing workplace

There are a number of workplace and employment barriers areas that we feel prevent fathers from playing a full fatherhood role in the upbringing of their children and that do not reflect the changing, and already changed, balance of responsibilities of men within work and the family.

Employer attitudes: Employers (including male and female employers) still expect women to do the majority of childcare. This has the disadvantage of both holding mothers back but also means father's requests for flexible working are viewed negatively. This attitude is drawn from wider society where the perception remains that children are the primary responsibility of women.

Research from the Working Families has shown fathers wanting flexible working are twice as likely to be viewed by their employer as being less committed than mothers and that working flexibly will have a negative impact on their career.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-39343754>

As set out by the Families Need Fathers (Cymru) report, 'A Father's Journey', separated fathers can also suffer additional barriers in a workplace setting, with the lack of work flexibility and understanding preventing them and their children from have a meaningful relationship.

<https://fnf.org.uk/component/phocadownload/file/109-the-father-s-journey>

The lack of well-paid paternity leave is a barrier with additional time spent often being taken as annual leave. There is no reason why, on the basis of parental equality and on shared parenthood, that there should be a difference between Statutory Maternity and Paternity Pay rates in the first six weeks of a child's birth.

The fact that there is both a difference in the time periods and rates of entitlement already acts as a structural barrier regarding fatherhood and the workplace. In effect, its acts as a clear push factor or disincentive for working men to be involved as fathers in the every first weeks of their child's birth.

This is compounded by evidence from the Fatherhood Institute which clearly shows the benefit to the child, mother and father in a father having a hands-on role at the very earliest stage in a child's life.

www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2014/fi-research-summary-paternity-leave

There are equality barriers for men who are taking on the primary care responsibility including 'stay-at-home' dads who are subsequently denied access to job and skills (re)training because these services are for women only. This both exacerbates and reinforces societal attitudes on the role of mothers and fathers in parenthood but is also a clear area of discrimination.

ISSUES TO PRIORITISE

- 1) Ensuring Government and other statutory bodies create a narrative that encourages and expects employers to be father-friendly, in the same way, they are rightly expected to be mother-friendly. This approach will also help to change broader societal attitudes.
- 2) Calling for the extension of statutory paternity pay to the same level as statutory maternity pay for the first six weeks, and that employers should offer equal parental pay and leave conditions for fathers and mothers
- 3) State that employers, companies and organisers running back-to-work job, training and (re)training schemes for returning parents and/or those with primary parental responsibility, should ensure they are available for both mothers and fathers.

5) Fostering good relations, promoting respect between groups and understanding of rights

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Issues Affecting Men and Boys formed in March 2021 and has published its first report highlighting the views of seven leading experts heard over four evidence sessions on what it is like to “To be a boy today”.

Between April and July 2021, the seven experts (See Annex 1 below) gave a snapshot of the disadvantages and challenges that so many boys face and their individual ideas they have to solve them. They spoke with respect to their particular areas of expertise in Family Life/Fatherlessness, Education, Community/Social influences and Health.

While the speakers gave evidence about different aspects of a boy’s life, a central theme that recurred in presentations to the APPG, is that the mainstream narrative on men and boys leads to a lack of action on the disadvantages and issues negatively affecting them – even when the figures are in plain sight.

The policy recommendations focussed on the need to tackle growing societal and gender stereotypical norms that view men, boys and masculinity as inherently bad/negative. This means problems they face are not tackled or recognised and the positive aspects of men and masculinity are not celebrated. This narrative exacerbates and reinforces these disadvantages.

At the Men and Boys Coalition we routinely experience in interactions with agencies and Government, that pervasive negative messaging has produced significant reluctance to openly and specifically support the wellbeing of boys and men, for fear of being seen as supporting an already unfairly privileged group. This is despite the clear and urgent statistics to the contrary, as outlined in the submission above.

Annex 1:

- 1) Family Life/Fatherlessness: Sonia Shaljean, Chief Executive, Lads Need Dads
- 2) Education: Professor Gijsbert Stoet, Professor of Psychology at the University of Essex and
Dr Erik Cownie, School of Applied Social and Policy Sciences, Ulster University
- 3) Community/Social influences: Professor Naomi Murphy, The Fens Unit, HMP Whitemoor and
Martin Seager, consultant clinical psychologist
- 4) Health: Martin Tod, Chief Executive, Men’s Health Forum and Natasha Devon MBE, founder of the Mental Health Media Charter

ISSUES TO PRIORITISE

- 1) Ensure the awareness and application of equalities legislation regarding to sex as a protected characteristic is applied to both men and women
- 2) Ensure the narrative in schools does not demonise boys as group, with particular reference to new PSHE guidelines that boys should not be demonised or treated as potential perpetrators, and their potential victimisation should be recognised
- 3) Challenge the use of language around male domestic abuse victims that minimises male victims and their experiences, creating additional barriers to support, help seeking and provision of services

5) Artificial Intelligence (AI) and emerging technologies

We have nothing to add under this priority aim at this time.

To deliver our aims and fulfil our duties effectively, we focus our work on a number of priority areas, using a range of powers and levers to achieve change. Are there any areas of focus missing from these proposals, which you would like to see the Equality and Human Rights Commission take action to address?

We would like to see action to address the barriers to help and provision of services faced by male victims of crimes currently defines as “Violence Against Women and Girls” crimes, which include sexual assault, domestic abuse, stalking and forced marriage.

Since 2010, successive British governments have maintained a rolling programme of cross-governmental policy strategy documents to end Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) which we support.

In a 2012 update it was acknowledged for the first time that male victims of (so-called) ‘VAWG’ offences should also be assumed to be included within the strategy. There is no record of this decision ever being formally debated or decided at any political level.

To be clear: we are categorically NOT suggesting the Violence Against Women Girls Strategy should be abolished. We are only asking that male survivors and victims are extricated from the VAWG strategy, and that their needs and all related issues be contained in a parallel strategy to prevent Intimate Violence Against Men and Boys.

Nor are we recommending a gender-neutral approach to intimate crimes. We argue that intimate crimes of violence and abuse against both men and women should be considered with a gender-inclusive approach, which acknowledges the key causal roles which can (or may) be played by gender in driving the perpetration of such offences and the importance of gender-sensitivity in developing support services for both female and male survivors. We also suggest that the VAWG strategy would be more effective in supporting women and girls if the data underpinning that policy were not confounded by the inclusion of men and boys.

What are the problems with including male victims/ survivors in the VAWG Strategy?

The issues are extensive and complex, the following list should be considered an outline of the issues, not necessarily an exhaustive list:

1. The VAWG strategy does not properly meet the needs of male victims/survivors and could not reasonably be expected to.

The social and psychological causes of IVAMB cannot be assumed to mimic and reflect the causes of VAWG. At an ideological level (as agreed in international treaties) VAWG is held to be both a cause and a consequence of gender inequality and this assumption permeates the VAWG strategy. The causes of IVAMB, are in key respects, profoundly different. Among the issues driving IVAMB are myths of male invulnerability and the gender stereotypes which say men cannot or should not be victims of such offences; the empathy gap with respect to male suffering; the marginalisation, minimisation and invisibilisation of male victims; prevailing social and structural homophobia; poor public understanding of the nature of male victimisation; lack of understanding among the public and some professionals of the nature and extent of female perpetration. These and many other gender-specific issues are unique to men and boys and not addressed or even acknowledged in the VAWG strategy.

2. Including men and boys in the VAWG strategy actively contributes to marginalisation, minimisation and invisibilisation of male victims.

One of the most commonly reported grievances of victims/survivors of IVAMB is a sense that no one wants to acknowledge their existence, that they are not the 'right' kind of victim or even a 'real' victim of these crimes. In practice this is often manifested in media coverage of issues such as domestic and sexual violence, where 'victims' and 'women' are used interchangeably, and if male victims are even mentioned it is as an afterthought or a curiosity. It should be considered deeply shocking that our national government strategy, which purports to support and include such victims is, by its very name and nature, actively contributing to this problem.

3. Including men and boys in the VAWG strategy forces male and female survivors into conflict and competition while obscuring the extent of support for both.

The VAWG strategy, while largely an expression of priorities, objectives and targets, also involves funding streams and other programmes of financial support. Most prominent of these is the government's VAWG Transformation Fund, worth £80m over four years. This is widely advertised and publicised as being the fund which supports organisations to end violence against women and girls. In practice, this is the same fund to which bodies must apply to fund projects supporting men and boys. This puts services for male and female victims/survivors in direct competition with each other and demands decisions as to whether male or female victims are more deserving. At the same time, it is close to impossible for public or media to establish how much support is actually being provided for women and girls, or for men and boys. Separate but parallel funding streams would enable both women's and men's sectors to actively campaign for a larger pot of funding, without effectively demanding that money should be taken away from the other, and would improve the visibility and transparency of the availability of funding to assist men and boys

4. Describing male survivors as 'women and girls' is deeply offensive and can be harmful.

No one likes to be misgendered at any time, it is invariably considered offensive and rude. But for male survivors of intimate crimes and abuse, the impacts of misgendering can be much deeper. Many male survivors struggle with a feeling that they have been demasculated by having been victimised or abused; many may question their own masculinity if they have been the victim of domestic violence, for example, or question their sexuality if they have been subject to sexual abuse by another male. Addressing these concerns is often a key stage in therapeutic recovery for male survivors. It continues to be a concern that the national government willingly participates in misgendering tens of thousands of male survivors who enter these systems every year, and millions of men who have been or will be affected in their lifetimes.

5. A parallel IVAMB strategy would allow male survivors and their representative organisations to design a strategy which meets their needs.

For obvious reasons, the VAWG strategy was designed and authored by individuals and organisations with expertise and experience in preventing violence against women and girls. There was minimal involvement from, or heed to individuals and organisations with equivalent expertise on male victim/survivors. A new strategy could lean on the groundwork and lessons learned through the years of the VAWG strategy but design a strategy which has the specific objectives of supporting men and boys.

ENDS