

**Coalition response to Home Office male victims position statement:
'Supporting male victims of crimes considered violence against women and girls'**

March 2022.

MBC POSITION SUMMARY

While welcoming some necessary, overdue revisions and improvements to the previous document, The Men and Boys Coalition is profoundly disappointed by the many shortcomings of the Home Office's published document 'Supporting male victims of crimes considered violence against women and girls.' The document is a passive position statement, what is urgently needed is an active strategy to prevent intimate violence against men and boys while properly respecting and supporting victims and survivors. The continued framing of male victimisation as a subset of 'violence against women and girls' not least in this document's title, reinforces and adds to the marginalization and minimization of the experiences of male victims of domestic, sexual and other intimate crimes and is considered to be grossly offensive and hurtful by most male victims.

FULL TRANSPARENCY

The newly published document is a revised version of the Home Office's 2019 Position Statement on Male Victims. The Men and Boys Coalition and many of our constituency organisations and individual members were involved at several stages of this document revision process. We fed into the initial Call for Evidence, participated in closed advisory/consultation sessions with the Home Office, and provided feedback on a draft version of the document. We were not involved in any decision making on the final edit and did not approve, sign off or endorse the published document.

IMPROVEMENTS FROM PREVIOUS POSITION STATEMENT

As a document which clarifies the Government's understanding of the extent and nature of male victimization, this revision contains a number of welcome and important new inclusions, many of which were specifically suggested and requested by the Coalition and our members. Taken in toto, these revisions help to illustrate the complex, intersectional nature of the experiences of male victims. We thank the Home Office for taking these on board and including them in the document. These include acknowledgement from the government, in most cases for the first time:

- That many male victims (especially of domestic abuse) are fathers and have parenting considerations among their needs.
- The heightened risk of victimization & barriers faced by disabled men.
- The heightened risks & barriers faced by GBT+ males
- The concerns & presence of male victims of so-called honour-based crimes and forced marriage.
- Male prisoners as a vulnerable group, both in terms of risks of ongoing sexual violence and as survivors of previous abuse.
- Higher rates of victimization & support needs among male migrants, especially male refugees, who may have no recourse to public funds.

SIGNIFICANT OMISSIONS

Even on its own terms as a 'position statement' there are some significant acknowledgements that we had hoped the Government would make but which did not appear. Most significant are these:

- There is no acknowledgement that male victims of crimes have the precise same legal rights and entitlement as female victims to support services, policing and justice, and health and social care. While this is a statement of fact under the Equality Act 2010 and other legislation, it regularly fails to materialize for male victims in practice. A clear assertion of these rights would have been extremely welcome.
- There is no acknowledgement that the perpetrators of some forms of intimate violence against men, most notably domestic violence, are commonly women. Indeed there is not a single explicit mention of female offending against men anywhere in the document. Observing that male victims of domestic violence have been abused by women may seem like a statement of the obvious, however it is widely (and wrongly) disputed, and in a context where male victims are being included in the category 'VAWG' and where in common usage, violence against women and girls is used interchangeably with 'male violence' or 'male violence against women' this is a significant and pointed omission. It has particular significance with regard to access to justice and policing, and the availability of perpetrator programmes and/or non-custodial sentencing for female offenders.

LACK OF STRATEGIC GOALS

The best way to support men and boys on this issue is to prevent crimes of abuse occurring in the first place. The most significant shortcoming of the new document is the absolute failure to offer any strategic, gender-specific approach to reducing the incidence of domestic violence, sexual abuse and other intimate offences against men and boys. Since the 2019 position statement was published, we have seen the conviction of serial rapist Reynhard Sinaga, convicted of crimes against 48 victims but believed by police to have attacked over 200 men in Manchester. We have also learned more about the conviction of Stephen Port, a serial killer who preyed on vulnerable young men and murdered four, while as we now know, police failed to investigate reports that could perhaps have seen him apprehended much earlier. There is no mention of these scandalous crimes in the position statement, far less any proposals to reduce risks of similar attacks happening in future.

We understand that the Government's position is that steps taken to reduce Violence Against Women and Girls, in their overarching strategy document, should serve to address crimes like these too. Given the ideological foundations upon which VAWG strategy are built, primarily theories of patriarchal male violence against women, this seems extremely far-fetched.

There is an urgent need to design strategies to prevent offending against men and boys, which engage with the realities of why such crimes are committed, what awareness raising and other preventative efforts would reduce risks and prevalence, and which services would meet the unique, gender specific needs of male survivors. Such a strategic approach is glaringly absent from the new document.

ON LISTED COMMITMENTS

The Coalition very much welcomes the decision to renew and maintain the £1.4m Male Rape Fund, and project-specific funding to Survivors UK and Safeline, along with the £47.1m provided in total to support both female and male victims of domestic abuse. We note however that this must be set against a context of severe funding crises for support and prevention services across both the women's and men's sectors and despite the government's acknowledgement that the demands on all such services have increased enormously in recent years.

The Coalition welcomes the Government's agreement to make explicit for the first time that the remit of the Home Office Minister for Safeguarding includes responsibility for male victims of so-called 'VAWG' crimes.

The other commitments offered by the Government in this document are welcome at face value, but we believe are severely compromised by the lack of any mechanism to ensure compliance. (See next section.)

ENSURING COMPLIANCE WITH STATED COMMITMENTS

We are deeply disappointed that the new document offers no mechanism to ensure compliance. No minister or Government department has been charged with overseeing progress towards stated objectives and there is no commitment to review, monitor and report progress. We have minimal faith that individuals and departments within Government will observe and adhere to the commitments made in this document, and offer two current instances which explain our scepticism.

1. The first stated commitment in the new document states: *'Whilst acknowledging the disproportionately gendered nature of VAWG, [we will] ensure Government VAWG communication campaigns are inclusive of male victims to raise awareness, challenge harmful societal myths about masculinity, and encourage male victims and survivors to report abuse.'* This is welcome. Except only this month the Home Secretary launched a major public awareness campaign on VAWG crimes 'ENOUGH!' which has no mention of male victims anywhere, and which does not even attempt to meet any of the promises above.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/home-secretary-says-enough-to-violence-against-women-and-girls>

For clarity, the Coalition believes campaigns around 'Violence Against Women and Girls' should in fact literally mean violence against women and girls - campaigns like ENOUGH! should NOT be about men and boys. We would much prefer separate, complementary campaigning which addresses the specific issues of male victims without diluting the power of much-needed campaigns to address violence against women. However, it is striking and bizarre that the Home Office publishes a document promising that all VAWG communications shall be inclusive of men and boys, while simultaneously running a major, high-profile campaign which does the exact opposite

2. The new document also mentions the new national policing plan for VAWG crimes that has been published by national VAWG coordinator Deputy Chief Constable Maggie Blyth, saying *"DCC Blyth recognises that there are victims across all offences captured within the VAWG area, including men and boys, and her plans will seek to utilise improvements for all victims regardless*

of sex.” This is categorically untrue. DCC Blyth published her framework plan in December 2021, it had no reference to the gender-specific needs of male victims, and most tellingly, the press release issued by her office quoted the Home Office definition of VAWG crimes while purposefully editing out the line stating that the definition applies to all victims, including men and boys. In a recent face-to-face meeting with representatives of the Men and Boys Coalition, The Male Survivors Partnership and the Mankind Initiative, DCC Blyth confirmed that while she hoped her work for female victims would have incidental benefits for male victims too, her plan was not designed to apply to male victims, she did not consider their unique circumstances and needs to be part of her remit, and she was not applying the Home Office’s definition of ‘Violence Against Women and Girls’ which includes male victims.

NEXT STEPS

We call upon the Government and all political parties to commit to ensuring that the current iteration of the Tackling Violence Against Women Strategy will be the last to include male victims, and to begin now the process of separating future strategies, policies and government statistics for Violence Against Women and Girls from those about intimate/abusive violence against men and boys.

We ask all members, supporters and friends to support campaigns for a parallel, complementary strategy to support male victims and prevent future offending, to raise these issues with your MP (and/or MSP, AM, MLA) and to keep us informed of any responses/ correspondence.

We welcome any invitations to further discussion, debate and public awareness. Do please get in touch.