



# Older Male Victims – Stereotyped Harm?



## **Policy Brief**

Last updated August 2023

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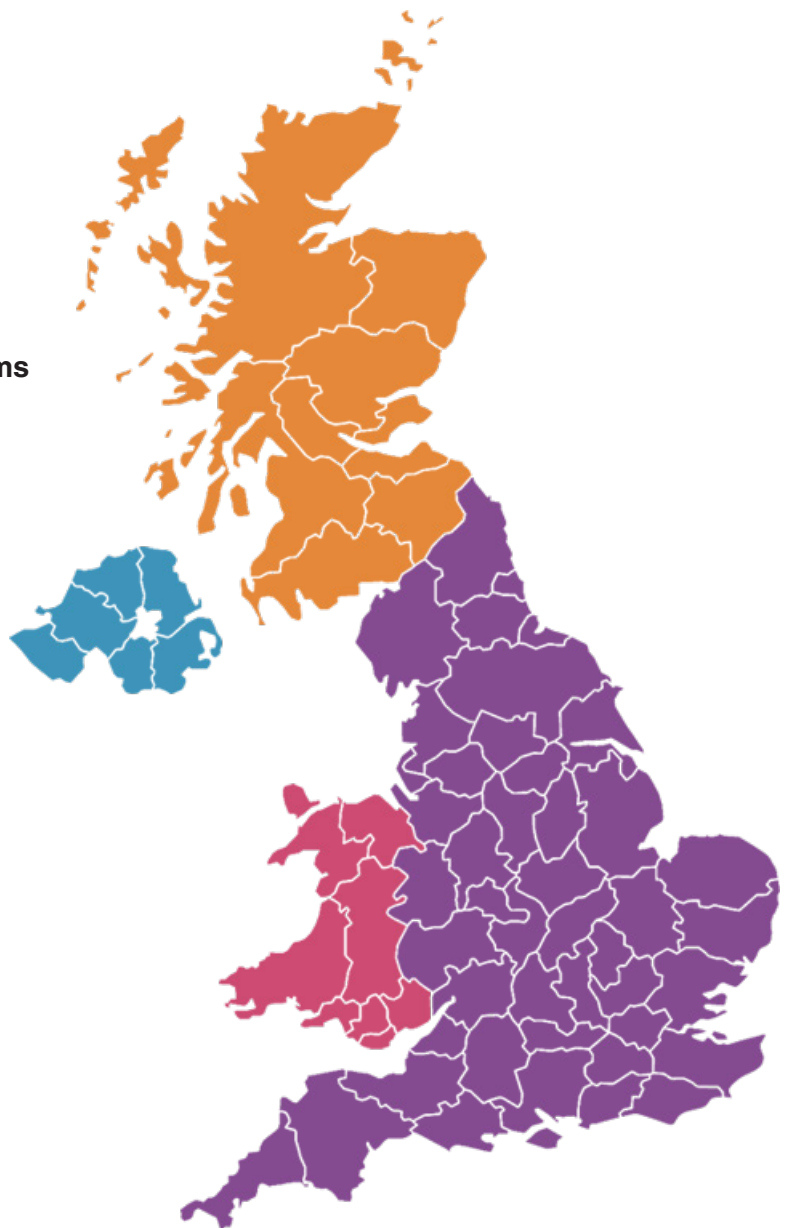
### Key Issues:

**Abuse and violence against older male victims is underrecognized and underreported.**

**Male specific factors can be barriers to seeking help or support.**

**Lack of health and support services tailored to older male victims.**

**Social isolation and fear of judgment for older male victims of abuse.**



## Recommendations:

### **Separate Government strategy focused on violence against men and boys to be instituted**

Hourglass believes there exists a fundamental problem with placing violence against men and boys within the wider Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) banner, and that it is necessary for a separate strategy focused on violence against men and boys to be instituted. Although Domestic Abuse/Sexual Violence (DASV) predominantly affects women and girls, there are unique needs, risk factors, and barriers to help that are specific to male victims both young and old. A separate understanding and strategy would ensure that targeted support for older male victims is available. Men and boys being included under a VAWG banner also helps contribute to the invisibility and minimalisation of male victims as a whole and especially older male victims, which is a key barrier to help seeking. The lack of equivalence within the domestic abuse narrative for male victims also helps ensure that public knowledge of older male victimisation stays under-recognised and underreported.

### **Gender Inclusive Training for practitioners in the health, abuse, and criminal justice spheres**

A key barrier to male victims seeking support and help is a fear of not being understood, being laughed at, or being stereotyped as perpetrators by those working in support services – gender inclusive and anti-stereotyping training that treats male victims as equal to women victim-survivors is sorely needed. As Bates and Douglas note “Gender-responsive services would require gender-responsive training for staff; indeed, some of the research indicates that the number of staff with dedicated responsibility for specific victim groups are often lacking...this lack of specific training is often specific to these underserved groups; for example, some practitioners supporting men within the United Kingdom have reported they do not get the same training, support or caseloads as those who were supporting female victims”.<sup>23</sup>

### **Targeted Awareness Raising Campaign – MARACS and IDVAs**

Hourglass concurs that targeted campaigns with a focus on male tailored imagery are necessary to help encourage all male victim-survivors to come forward to engage with the support services that are available. Imagery should also speak to both the “concerned other” (family members, neighbours, friends concerned about an older male at risk of abuse or violence) and the general public wherein greater knowledge of the challenges and barriers that both older male victims and all older victims face is hugely needed. Both MARACS (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences) and IDVAs (Independent Domestic Violence Advocates) are key DA support elements that can help provide key assistance to older male victims.

## Policy Problem:

**The abuse of male victims is hugely under recognised, underreported, under theorised, and under detected. Older men in particular have typically been excluded from data and studies on victim-survivors of domestic and other forms of abuse.**

From the studies that do exist, older male victims appear to be more likely to suffer from physical abuse than female victims.<sup>1</sup> Data from the National Elder Mistreatment Survey in the US found that in cases of emotional/psychological abuse, male victims were found to be more dependent on the perpetrator of said abuse than female victims were, by 29% to 10%.<sup>2</sup> While looking at abuse types from Hourglass 2022 Helpline data, economic abuse was the most commonly seen abuse type with male victims, closely followed by psychological abuse.<sup>3</sup>

As for risk factors, social isolation and lack of social engagement is a key risk factor for older male victims. Male victim-survivors seem less likely to receive social support from informal networks than women and are mainly focused on their partners or spouses.<sup>4</sup> Overall, it appears that men show a lower level of social engagement, due to their prevalent reliance on their spouses/partners for social support, and consequently have lower participation in social activities.<sup>5</sup> The reliance on spousal relationships may mean that older male victim survivors in general are lacking any form of “escape valve” or other friends and family to confide in.

While older men do not report abuse for many of the same reasons as older women, there are also male specific factors - namely the social construction of manhood, and notions of cultural stoicism/internalised sexism which say to men they must be masculine and not show fear. This is doubly relevant when considering older male victim-survivors who were raised within specific cultural and societal milieus which promoted a traditionalised construction of manhood. As Loree Cook-Daniels notes “[abused] Men, in addition, may feel that their very masculinity has been stripped from them. In these cases, admitting that one has been victimized in essence means proclaiming that one is no longer fully male”.<sup>6</sup>

Stereotypes about power, gender, and the victim/perpetrator dynamic may also stop male victims seeking help. Interpersonal Violence (IPV) and wider domestic abuse has generally been considered in gendered models and terms, and the status of “victim” does not seem to apply to men and women equally.<sup>7</sup> Gender-based stereotypes dictate men are dominant, strong, and aggressive which is more compatible with the role of an abuser<sup>8</sup>, with women as weaker, vulnerable and in need of protection, more in line with the role of a victim. Men report that the most significant barrier to help-seeking is the fear of not being taken seriously, or not being believed,<sup>9</sup> or being seen to be the perpetrator of violence.<sup>10</sup>

The invisibility of help and support needs are also a factor that is raised within the academic and third sector literature on male victims. As with all older victims, male victims are not usually seen in support literature or through signposting.<sup>11</sup> Fears around confidentiality may also be a barrier to help seeking behaviour by male victims. Worries about the inappropriate handling of confidential information by professional services, and the reticence by some male victims to disclose or talk about abuse to a female professional have been noted.<sup>12</sup>

Lack of effective intervention facilities are also a problem for older male victims of abuse, much as they are for older female victims. The particular experiences of domestic abuse or wider abuse types in older age means all-age refuges are often not appropriate, as older victims, men, and women, are more likely to have caring duties or their own care and support needs.

Imagery of refuges and support services that feature predominantly younger women and children can also mean that older men and women perceive these services as being inappropriate for them.<sup>13</sup> In 2018, SafeLives noted that only 4% of victims accessing IDVA services were men.<sup>14</sup> However, while older female victims have options to go to safe female spaces (even if not suitable), these spaces are either closed to older male victims or do not exist.<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth Bates notes that there are accounts of men who discuss their further victimisation by services after being laughed at, blamed for their victimisation, or not believed because of their physicality.<sup>16</sup> According to Mankind Initiative, currently in the UK there are only 39 organisations with 220 refuge/safehouse spaces for male victim-survivors - only 58 are solely available for male victims.<sup>17</sup> Potentially as a link to the lack of support structures, 11% of all male victims (7.2% of women) consider taking their life due to domestic abuse.<sup>18</sup>

In 2018, the domestic abuse charity Refuge conducted research into their client base, providing original evidence on the prevalence of suicidal ideation and attempts amongst clients who had experienced domestic abuse.<sup>19</sup> The psychological harms associated with domestic abuse are well known, 'depression, post-traumatic stress, anxiety and their behavioural consequences, such as social isolation, substance mis-use and self-harm (in its broadest sense), are common outcomes of such abuse,'<sup>20</sup> Among Refuge's client base almost a quarter (24%) had felt suicidal at one time or another; 18% had made plans to end their life; 3.1% had made at least one suicide attempt.<sup>21</sup> This is strong evidence to suggest more needs to be done to respond to the both physical and psychological impacts of abuse, with a specific focus on older male victims.

Finally, men are also seen as victims of domestic homicide, although in much smaller number than female victims. While unfortunately no age-related data was available, between 2019 and 2021 – in 104 cases of domestic homicide, men were victims. This is compared over the same period to 269 domestic homicide with women as victims. For men, in 61 cases the perpetrator was a male family member (6 cases with male partner or ex-partner), with only 33 cases involving female perpetrators (29 female partner or ex-partner and 4 female family members.)<sup>22</sup>

## Recommendations:

### **Separate Government strategy focused on violence against men and boys to be instituted**

Hourglass believes there exists a fundamental problem with placing violence against men and boys within the wider Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) banner, and that it is necessary for a separate strategy focused on violence against men and boys to be instituted. Although Domestic Abuse/Sexual Violence (DVSX) predominantly affects women and girls, there are unique needs, risk factors, and barriers to help that are specific to male victims both young and old. A separate understanding and strategy would ensure that targeted support for older male victims is available. Men and boys being included under a VAWG banner also helps contribute to the invisibility and minimalisation of male victims as a whole and especially older male victims, which is a key barrier to help seeking. The lack of equivalence within the domestic abuse narrative for male victims also helps ensure that public knowledge of older male victimisation stays under-recognised and underreported.

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## Consulted or recommended resources

- 1 Melchiorre Maria Gabriella et al, Abuse of Older Men in Seven European Countries: A Multilevel Approach in the Framework of an Ecological Model, PLoS One. (2016), Volume 11, Issue 1.
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- 5 Patricia A. Thomas, "Gender, Social Engagement, and Limitations in Late Life," Social Science & Medicine 73, no. 9 (2011): [PAGE], doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2011.07.035
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- 7 Paula B. Poorman, Eric P. Seelau, and Sheila M. Seelau, "Perceptions of Domestic Abuse in Same-Sex Relationships and Implications for Criminal Justice and Mental Health Responses," Violence and Victims 18, no. 6 (2003): [PAGE], doi:10.1891/vivi.2003.18.6.659
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- 11 Alyson L Huntley, Lucy Potter, Emma Williamson et al "Help-seeking by male victims of domestic violence and abuse (DVA): a systematic review and qualitative evidence synthesis" (2018)
- 12 Alyson L Huntley, Lucy Potter, Emma Williamson et al "Help-seeking by male victims of domestic violence and abuse (DVA): a systematic review and qualitative evidence synthesis" (2018)
- 13 Joosten M et al 'Violence Against Older Women: Intergenerational Family Violence' in Bowes, H (Ed.) (2019) Violence Against Older Women, Volume 1.
- 14 SafeLives Insights (2018)
- 15 Elizabeth A. Bates, "'No One Would Ever Believe Me': An Exploration of the Impact of Intimate Partner Violence Victimization on Men.," Psychology of Men & Masculinities 21, no. 4 (2020): [PAGE], doi:10.1037/men0000206
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- 17 Mankind Practitioners Network Meeting – 29th January 2021.
- 18 Mankind Practitioners Network Meeting – 29th January 2021
- 19 Office of National Statistics "Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2022" (2022)
- 20 Elizabeth Bates and Emily Douglas. Services for domestic violence victims in the United Kingdom and United States: where are we today? Partner Abuse, 11 (3). pp. 350-382. (2020)



# Hourglass

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