



## **Good Practice Briefing**

**Respect briefing on working with male victims of domestic violence**



## **ASCENT - Support services to organisations**

Ascent is a partnership within the London Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Consortium, delivering a range of services for survivors of domestic and sexual violence, under six themes, funded by London Councils.

ASCENT – Support services to organisations, is delivered by a partnership led by the Women’s Resource Centre (WRC) and comprised of five further organisations: AVA, IMKAAN, RESPECT, Rights of Women, and Women and Girls Network.

This second tier support project aims to address the long term sustainability needs of organisations providing services to those affected by sexual and domestic violence on a pan-London basis.

The project seeks to improve the quality of such services across London by providing a range of training and support, including:

- Accredited training
- Expert-led training
- Sustainability training
- Borough surgeries
- BME network
- One-to-one support
- Policy consultations
- Newsletter
- Good practice briefings

### **Good practice briefings**

The purpose of the good practice briefings is to provide organisations supporting those affected by domestic and sexual violence with information to help them become more sustainable and contribute with making their work more effective.

For more information, please see:

[www.thelondonvawgconsortium.org.uk](http://www.thelondonvawgconsortium.org.uk)



**London  
VAWG  
Consortium**

**Context:**

When Respect was founded the majority of our work involved developing services and disseminating best practice on how to work with perpetrators of domestic violence. Much of what we knew about domestic violence at that time was based on the premise that perpetrators were male and victims were female. As safe support for perpetrators was such a clearly identifiable gap in domestic violence provision we focused our efforts in this area and on men using violence in their relationships in particular.

We set up our first helpline service (Respect Phonenumber) to offer support to perpetrators of domestic violence and attempted to link them into programmes in their locality that supported them through a process of change.

Most programmes at this time were only able to work with male perpetrators. However, many began to report back that although this was their main source of referrals increasingly they were starting to identify a smaller but significant cohort of men that were victims of domestic violence, as well as female perpetrators. Consequently, by early 2007 Respect had taken over the management of the previously Devon-based M.A.L.E (Men's Advice Line and Enquiries) helpline for male victims of domestic violence and re-launched it with a Freephone number – with funding made available by the Home Office.

Since 2007 the Men's Advice Line has helped more than 16,400 callers and replied to more than 6,360 emails<sup>1</sup>, developed a one-day training course on working with male victims of domestic violence for frontline workers and published a Toolkit for working with male victims of domestic violence<sup>2</sup>. We continue to research and evaluate data in this area. We have encountered a number of (often competing) views along the way, including “there are no male victims, all victims are female and all men who present as victims are perpetrators” and “the same type and quantity of services are needed for male victims as for female”. Our overall aim – as it remains with in work we do with perpetrators of domestic violence – is always to increase safety for victims and children. The following is an attempt to provide some helpful commentary on what we have learned from work with male victims since 2007 and demystify some of the ideas that surround it:

**Q: Aren't men presenting as male victims of domestic violence just perpetrators in disguise?**

A: No, the majority of men presenting to services as male victims have a genuine need for help and support as victims. While it is true that in heterosexual relationships if you factor in coercive control, sexual violence, homicide, 4+ violent incidents and levels of injury you find the majority of victims are female and majority of perpetrators male – this still leaves a significant cohort of men who are victims of their female partner's violence, as well as male victims in same-sex relationships.

Furthermore, evidence from services working with male victims shows that only a minority of the men approaching services are perpetrators who perceive themselves as victims.

**Q: But surely if some men present as victims when they're not you need some sort of screening process?**

A: No. What services need are systems to engage with these men in ways that minimise risk (in some cases this will require specialist training). However, services should not avoid engaging with male clients out of fear that some of them might be perpetrators. There are more male victims needing help and support than male perpetrators presenting as victims. The key to this

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<sup>1</sup> Calls logged on the Men's Advice Line database between 2007-30 September 2013

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.mensadviceline.org.uk/pages/toolkit-for-work-with-male-victims-of-domestic-violence.html>

is a robust assessment process that can direct men to the services they need. Screening implies a need to exclude people from services. Even if the man presenting was a perpetrator this would be unhelpful as a response.

**Q: So what would make responses to male victims better?**

A: Broadly there needs to be recognition of men as victims. Men from all age and ethnic backgrounds report experiencing domestic violence and services will need to know how to respond, particularly as more men are now coming forward. Male callers to the Men's Advice Line tells us about their experiences with the Police, Social Services and other agencies and they feel not-believed or they find the frontline workers speaking to them suspicious. Exploring and assessing the experiences, needs and risks of men presenting as victims will give practitioners a good understanding about who is a victim, who is a perpetrator and who is a client in an unhappy relationship but not experiencing domestic violence.

**Q: Does this mean we should just offer men the same services that we offer female victims of domestic violence?**

A: No. If we do not listen to male victims properly and simply replicate what already exists for women there is a danger that we will not respond adequately to their needs. Services for female victims evolved from a premise of understanding the specific and specialist needs of that client group. Over time this led to greater diversification, not less. It is important we apply a needs-based approach to developing services for male victims. For example many men ringing our advice line are initially asking for practical support around legal issues such as child contact, non-molestation orders and housing. Gay male victims are much more likely to report/experience higher levels of physical violence, sexual violence and post-separation stalking and harassment. Specialist services need to be tailored accordingly. Generic services need to offer services to male victims and market them appropriately.

**Q: So what things should we be looking for in identifying male victims?**

A: In all domestic violence cases there is always value in investigating who is doing what to whom. The complexity of a relationship is not always easy to unpick – particularly where abusive behaviour is taking place. We have found there is benefit in asking the following:

- “If violence took place who ended it? (As opposed to started it)”
- “Who suffered most physical injury? (Consistently over time)”
- “Which person is in fear of the other? (Often for their lives)”

In our experience answers to these questions can be useful in determining how violence in the relationship is experienced and where the balance of power lies. Additionally, (although this comes with the caveat that further assessment will be required and you should not rely upon tick boxes alone) male victims will usually have the following in common:

- They will have experienced incidents of violent and/or abusive behaviour from a partner or other
- They have been injured and required medical attention as a result of their partner's behaviour
- They will be in fear of violence to their selves or children
- They are experiencing a pattern of coercive control from their partner – e.g. they feel controlled and unable to make decisions

- They are fearful of violence at separation or because separation has already taken place
- They are able to give authentic descriptions of incidents, injuries, fear and control etc.
- They typically don't 'badmouth' their (ex) partner.

**Q: What services are available from Respect for male victims?**

A: They can ring the Men's Advice line for free on **0808 801 0327** or contact us through our website: [www.mensadviceline.org.uk](http://www.mensadviceline.org.uk)

**Q: What advice is there for professionals wanting further information?**

A: They can contact us through the routes above. We also offer training on working with male victims which includes a copy of our toolkit. Contact [thangam.debbonaire@respect.uk.net](mailto:thangam.debbonaire@respect.uk.net) for details.

**Men's Advice Line: 0808 801 0327** [www.mensadviceline.org.uk](http://www.mensadviceline.org.uk) [info@mensadviceline.org.uk](mailto:info@mensadviceline.org.uk)