

Male victims of domestic violence and the Men's Advice Line

blog.crimestoppers-uk.org/male-victims-domestic-violence-mens-advice-line/

Crime Matters



Ippo Panteloudakis is the Helplines Manager at the [Men's Advice Line](#), a dedicate service run by the charity [Respect](#). In his blog post he discusses the issues of Domestic Violence against men and the resources available.

Peter was being abused by his ex-partner Katie for 2 years. He self-harmed and eventually attempted suicide as a result of the abuse and the isolation he felt because of his disability. Peter felt he couldn't hit back because she is a woman. When Katie and their 2 sons moved out of his house six months ago, he was relieved, but she continued to harass and threaten him. He wants to move out of the area as they live close by, with Katie's new boyfriend who Peter thinks is violent. He wants to sort out regular contact with the children and he is worried that Katie's new boyfriend might be scaring them. He has support from family and friends.

The Men's Advice Line has supported thousands of men like Peter since 2007. Peter was fortunate to have friends and family to talk to and to be living on his own after his abusive ex-partner moved out. Other men are not so fortunate and they still have to put up with a range of abusive behaviours by those who, supposedly, should love and care for them in their own homes that should be safe havens.

Domestic violence affects men too

The Men's Advice Line is a freephone, confidential helpline service for male victims of domestic violence – in heterosexual or same-sex relationships. It is run by Respect – the UK association for domestic violence perpetrator programmes and associated support services. We also run the Respect Phonenumber (www.respectphonenumber.org.uk), a helpline for perpetrators of domestic violence looking for help to change. Both helplines are accredited by The Helplines Association.

Demand

The Men's Advice Line spoke to 4,517 callers in 2013 (in April we extended the opening hours to 9am-5pm Monday to Friday); 2,429 of those were men who presented as victims of domestic violence; we also replied to 1,548 emails. In 2012 we spoke to 2,732 callers and replied to 1,341 emails. This significant increase shows there is more awareness among men that they can be domestic violence victims too and they are becoming more likely to ask for help. We routinely speak to hundreds of concerned friends and family of male victims as

well as to frontline workers.

What do male victims of domestic violence need?

Every year we signpost callers to a wide variety of agencies for further advice and support. Top of the list of these agencies were legal advice, Police and Community Safety Units, housing advice and individual counselling. These are the issues most often brought up by male victims and we signpost them accordingly. It is interesting to note that whilst there is a lot of interest for housing advice, the need for a referral to a male refuge is rather rare. We believe that anyone working with male victims should be familiar with a range of legal rights and support services available and update signposting information on an ongoing basis.

Some of the issues:

Men's help seeking: some men are reluctant to access help, not knowing where to turn to, what they need or want. Often they lack the emotional vocabulary to allow them to express how they feel about their situation and they present complex stories with many different issues. They don't always prioritise the domestic violence/abuse side of the problem, often minimising it out of embarrassment or being unaware that violence/abuse doesn't have place in a healthy relationship. Some men need to feel listened to and 'take it off their chest' and that is all they need; others need to be referred to legal advice or other specialist advice (housing, mental health, immigration etc).

Some men's own perception in relation to how others will treat them as victims affects how and if they reach out for help: they don't want to come across as weak and some have decided that they will get an unsympathetic or hostile response from the Police, Social Services etc. This gets more problematic when men get the message that they should be able to fend for themselves and they sometimes choose to respond to violence with violence – a tactic that puts everyone at more risk of harm.

Although attitudes are changing, gender stereotypes make it difficult for some to think of men as victims, i.e. men must always be strong and if they are physically stronger they can't be victims. However, the Men's Advice Line is finding, through hundreds of calls with frontline workers every year, that statutory and voluntary agencies have become aware of the need to work with male victims and respond to their needs. There is high demand for training on work with male victims as well as for any resources to help with engaging male victims.

Another issue some callers bring is the use of violence by both partners – working out who the 'primary perpetrator/aggressor' is in these cases and who was genuinely in self-defence is crucial if we want to manage the risk and increase the safety of victims. It is well established by now that some perpetrators approach victim services claiming they are the victim in their relationship. This has important implications for service delivery as perpetrators may be offered support as victims and victims as perpetrators.

How we work

Our focus is on minimising risk and increasing safety – we discuss short-term strategies with callers to help them avoid future violent incidents. The focus is on safety whether the caller is a victim, perpetrator or a client whose relationship is breaking down but is not experiencing domestic violence.

We provide emotional & practical support in a non-judgemental and non-collusive way. We give them the space to talk and feel listened to. We promote a self-help ethos, we want men to feel empowered to regain control of their situation, call the Police if they feel it necessary, speak to Social Services, access legal advice, medical help etc.

We signpost to a wide range of agencies for: legal, housing, drug and alcohol, child contact, parenting, mental health issues etc.

Callers' profile

- Predominantly White-British heterosexual men 25-45
- Callers of Asian origin overrepresented on helpline (around 9%)
- Gay men report experiencing substantially higher levels of violence than heterosexual callers
- Predominantly still living with partner and with children

Resources

- The Men's Advice Line has published a 32-page booklet for male victims with information about domestic violence, services men can access and clear messages to help them understand their situation. This is free for victims.
- We have published a toolkit for professionals working with male victims. It includes research on assessing and meeting the needs of male victims, suggested ways to respond as well as assessment forms that can be adapted for the needs of different agencies. It's free to download from the Men's Advice Line website: <http://www.mensadviceline.org.uk/pages/toolkit-for-work-with-male-victims-of-domestic-violence.html>

0808 8010327 Monday – Friday 9am-5pm

[Men's Advice Line](#)