

# Seeking Sanctuary

REGISTERED COUNSELLOR AND PSYCHOTHERAPIST, SHARON HINSULL, SHARES HER EXPERTISE.

Acts of domestic abuse perpetrated against men are far from uncommon. Indeed, the number of reported cases in the UK is steadily increasing year on year.

According to the latest figures released by the Office for National Statistics, a total of 757,000 men reported being victims of domestic abuse in the year

2019/20. Whilst this represents around half the annual number of women who report experiences of domestic abuse, the rising incidence of male victims reaching out for support would appear to reflect an increasing willingness on the part of men to open up about issues affecting their mental health. Earlier research into the subject had indicated

that male victims of domestic violence were almost three times less likely to disclose their experiences of abuse than their female counterparts; however, that tendency would appear to be steadily changing. The number of domestic abuse cases reported across the UK rose significantly during recent periods of lockdown, and men's support charity the

**“757,000 MEN REPORTED BEING VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE IN THE YEAR 2019/20”**

**Sharon Hinsull**

Mankind Initiative has seen an increase of 25-33% in calls received by its helpline.



**BREAKING THE TABOO**

Men are often reluctant to report abuse because they feel ashamed or humiliated, fear they might not be believed, or are scared that their partner might take revenge. In many cases, male victims of domestic abuse might not even realise that they are being subjected to behaviour that constitutes a criminal offence.

Paul Chivers, a survivor of domestic violence who is now a trustee of the Mankind Initiative says: “It’s important to remember that many people experiencing abuse feel ashamed of their situation and don’t want to draw attention to it. This can be particularly true for male survivors.”

In Paul’s case, it was concern for his young daughter’s welfare that kept him trapped in a highly abusive relationship for over a decade. Ultimately, however, the abuse towards him became so

extreme that he had no choice but to remove himself and his daughter from the family home.

“My wife would lock me out of the house or leave me on the side of the road, miles from home with no money; I was locked out of the house around 60 times over the course of almost 10 years. She’d take my wallet and keys so I had no way of getting home. I found myself walking on eggshells, being coerced into situations I really didn’t want to be in. She often told me I would never see my daughter again if I didn’t do what she wanted. Despite all of this, I felt I couldn’t leave the family home for the sake of our daughter.”

Over time, the abuse that Paul experienced at the hands of his wife escalated into serious violence. “The time came to leave her when she split my head open after smashing a hair dryer over my head. At this point I realised I had to take action.”

**RECOGNISING THE WARNING SIGNS**

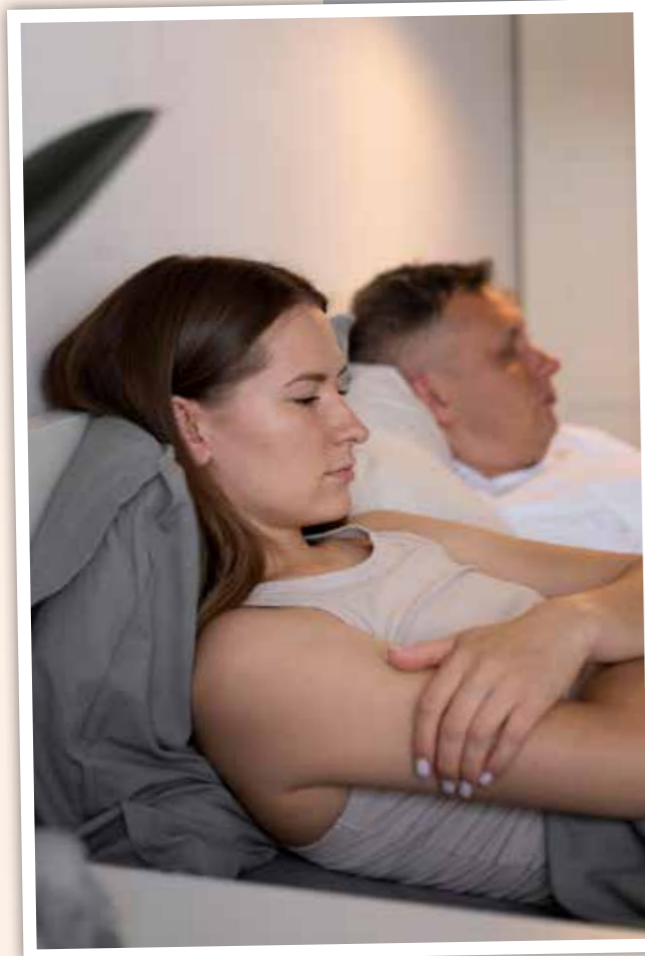
Domestic abuse covers a far broader spectrum of behaviours than many people might imagine, and its definition in law goes well beyond the bounds of physical violence. The long-term impact of systematic emotional or psychological abuse can be extremely damaging and debilitating for the victims involved. It is also important to remember that domestic abuse is not an exclusively

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partner-on-partner crime; it can just as easily be meted out at the hands of ex-partners and other members of a person’s household, young or old.





**“43% OF MALE VICTIMS HAD DISTRESS SCORES HIGH ENOUGH TO SUPPRESS THE IMMUNE SYSTEM”**

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“The analysis of responses to a survey of 538 men revealed that male victims had significant physical and mental reactions to coercion. Almost eight out of ten male victims had scores indicating that PTSD was a concern. Additionally, 43% of male victims had distress scores high enough to suppress the immune system. “Respondents frequently described the severe impact of this abuse, including depression and feelings of helplessness, anxiety, stress and feeling trapped, rather than fear. Many participants felt that the lack of awareness among social services had left them vulnerable.”

As well as physically violent and psychologically coercive behaviours, domestic abuse against men can include bullying, sexual violence and financial control or exploitation.

**COERCIVE CONTROL**

Since becoming recognised as a criminal offence in 2015, the legal definition of Coercive Control is that of “An act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten a victim.”

A recent survey undertaken by the Mankind Initiative in conjunction with the University of Central Lancashire revealed the lasting and traumatising impact that coercive control can have on male victims. The joint report concluded that many men who have been subjected to coercive behaviour go on to suffer significant mental health issues as a result.



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According to Nottingham-based domestic violence charity Equation, a man who is being abused may be subjected to some or all of the following behaviours:

- **Bullying: mocking, humiliation, insults, criticism**
- **Control: Being checked up on, followed, or stalked**
- **Threats: intimidation, attacks or violence**
- **Destruction of their possessions**
- **Isolation: being stopped from seeing family and friends**
- **Being forced into sex**
- **Having money taken or controlled**
- **Lying, blame and denial of the abuse**



**HELP IS AT HAND**

When it comes to seeking out support, domestic violence survivor Paul Chivers believes that male victims should reach out for help at the earliest opportunity. “It can feel hard for some people, particularly men, to report domestic abuse. But my situation shows that you will be taken seriously and given the right support. I would encourage any other victims to contact helplines, local organisations and the police, who can help put a stop to the abuse.”

**SOURCES OF SUPPORT**

**Mankind Initiative**

The Mankind Initiative charity provides information and support to men who find themselves the victims of domestic violence or abuse. Help and guidance is available on reporting incidents, police procedures, housing, benefits and injunctions. There is also a referral facility to refuge accommodation, local authority and other support services.

**Men’s Advice Line**

The Men’s Advice Line is a confidential helpline for all men experiencing domestic violence by a current or ex-partner. As well as offering emotional support and practical advice, the helpline provides details of specialist services dealing with legal, housing, child contact, mental health and other issues.

**Refuge**

In addition to supporting women and children affected by domestic abuse, the charity Refuge also provides support for male victims, running a range of outreach and advocacy programmes across the country.

**National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline**

As the UK’s LGBT+ anti-abuse charity, Galop works with and for LGBT+ victims and survivors of interpersonal abuse and violence. Helpline: 0800 999 5428

**AMIS (Abused Men in Scotland)**

AMIS supports men who are experiencing, or who have experienced domestic abuse and also offers advice to those concerned about the safety of

such men and their children. Helpline: 0800 800 0024

**Scotland’s Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline**

Scotland’s Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage helpline is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Its multilingual staff are there to support anyone in Scotland who has experienced, or is at risk of experiencing domestic abuse or forced marriage, as well as those concerned about others at risk. Helpline number: 0800 027 1234

**The Dyn Project (Wales)**

The Safer Wales Dyn Helpline provides free confidential support to all men who experience domestic abuse in Wales. It provides information on the local services available, help in developing a personalised safety plan and support in accessing other services and organisations. Helpline: 0808 801 0321

**Men’s Advisory Project (Northern Ireland)**

Amongst its range of services, MAPNI offers confidential counselling and support for men in Northern Ireland who are experiencing, or have experienced domestic violence or abuse. ❖

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