



The Rt. Honourable Boris Johnson, MP
Prime Minister
Office of the Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

Saturday 20th June 2020

Re: Domestic violence and abuse against men & the urgent need for a Minister for Men

Dear Prime Minister,

We are writing to you as you prepare to celebrate your first Father's Day with your new son Wilfred. We know that this should be a magical time for any dad, but for many men in this country it is not.

Firstly, we wish to raise with you our concerns about a pervasive and dangerous structural bias against men on the issue of domestic violence. Whether in Parliament or amongst the public more generally domestic violence by women against men is treated in a light-hearted or humorous way.

Indeed when the issue of holding a debate on gender issues including domestic violence against men, male suicide and the premature mortality rates for men was first put forward in 2015 by Philip Davies, a member of the Backbench Business Committee, Jess Phillips, burst out laughing at the mere suggestion that MPs should be allowed to debate them,¹ saying "as the only woman on this committee, it seems like every day to me is International Men's Day".²

¹ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/thinking-man/11962537/Whats-so-funny-about-a-mens-rights-debate.html>

² <https://www.itv.com/news/2015-10-30/labour-mp-jess-phillips-targeted-by-trolls-after-scoffing-at-mens-rights-debate-request/>

Ms Philips, went further in an article for the Independent Newspaper, saying: “...Men are celebrated, elevated and awarded every day of the week on every day of the year. Being a man is its own reward. You hit the jackpot when you are born a boy child.”³

Ms Philips comments are far from unique and reflect a view that men are always the abusers and never the abused. Yet according to the last ONS Crime Survey for England and Wales, 1 in 3 domestic abuse victims are men, some 786,000 per year.⁴ Put another way over 2,000 men every day are victims of domestic abuse, yet there is still little or no support for the victims.

A survey, we conducted last year to coincide with International Men’s day highlighted the appalling lack of support for male victims of domestic abuse. Out of 300 local authorities, **just three** confirmed dedicated refuge provision for men – just 13 dedicated beds across the whole of the UK. Two further authorities provided dispersed or out-of-area accommodation. Setting this in context, 18 councils spent £21million of taxpayers’ money on services for women, but were unable to confirm even £1 spent on men.⁵

This comes as the male suicide epidemic shows no sign of diminishing. Every day, nearly 14 men take their own lives around 5,000 deaths a year – yet the majority of councils have no specific programmes to cut the male suicide rate and the governmental response thus far has been disappointing.⁶

Last year, before you became the Prime Minister we released findings of a ComRes poll, which found that an estimated two million dads might not see their children Father’s Day, while one in five dads, feared losing, or had lost contact with their children and a similar number knew someone who had experienced this.⁷

When we asked about how this had impacted on those affected a third said they had experienced or knew someone who had experienced distress, or mental health issues after being denied access to their children. A copy of our polling was sent to the former Prime Minister and the former Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee. I am sad to say that neither replied.

³ <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/we-need-international-mens-day-about-as-much-as-a-white-history-month-or-able-body-action-day-a6740646.html>

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<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwalesoverview/november2019>

⁵ <https://conservativewoman.co.uk/why-we-need-a-minister-for-men/>

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<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/suicideintheunitedkingdom/2018registrations>

⁷ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/06/16/four-10-dads-have-not-seen-kids-fathers-day-survey-finds/>

Added to this has been the disproportionate impact that COVID-19 is having on men. According to numerous reports up to 70 per cent of the deaths linked to Coronavirus are men.^{8 9 10 11}

We believe that fatherlessness is a dangerous epidemic causing untold emotional harm to children and fathers and that equality for men is no laughing matter.

It has never been clearer that the only thing toxic about masculinity is the disgraceful way those in authority treat men, whether as victims of domestic abuse, the denial of basic equal parenting rights for separated dads, or the blind eye turned to the scandal of male suicide.

This is why we are writing to you Prime Minister, copying in all members of Parliament asking you and our elected representatives to commit on Father's Day to end this crisis. In particular, we would like to ask you if you support the following proposals:

1. More money to combat male suicide, which claimed 4,903 in 2018, which has been the case since the mid-1990s
2. A legal presumption of 50/50 Shared Parenting and Child Support after separation
3. Include contact denial and parental alienation within the government definition of domestic violence and a criminal offence
4. Legislation that introduces automatic parental responsibility for all fathers even when they are not married
5. Appointment of a Minister for Men
6. Replacing the Women and Equalities Committee, with an Equalities Committee
7. Reform of the Child Support Agency and Child Maintenance Service
8. A specific offence of using COVID lockdown measures to deny parental access

Yours sincerely,

Matt O'Connor
Founder of Fathers 4 Justice

⁸ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/coronavirus-death-toll-italy-south-korea-sex-update-cases-map-men-women-a9413271.html>

⁹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2020/03/19/coronavirus-kills-more-men-than-women/>

¹⁰ <https://www.newscientist.com/article/2240898-why-are-men-more-likely-to-get-worse-symptoms-and-die-from-covid-19/>

¹¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2020/jun/11/who-does-coronavirus-kill-in-england-and-wales-visualising-the-data>