

REPORT

To the best of our knowledge and ability, this is an account of the Meeting on Tuesday 26th April 2005 at the Home Office, London.

Present: John Dunworth, Head of Domestic Violence, Home Office.
Female Member of Domestic Violence Unit, Home Office
Dave Mortimer, SNAP/ManKind Initiative
Anne Harris, SNAP/Mankind Initiative

The informal meeting started with introductions and a brief description about SNAP and ManKind and their work with male domestic abuse victims. It was explained that both groups were spearheading work to create a gender-neutral approach to domestic violence within the family. John Dunworth said he was aware that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men were victims but continued to quote statistics from the 2001 British Crime Survey indicating that there were 1.5 million abuse victims and from that figure 89% were women. John asked if we belonged to any of our local authority groups and Anne Harris said she belonged to the St Neots Area Community Safety Task Group and had been asked to be a representative on Violence Against the Person Thematic Working Group covering Abuse and Anti-Social Behaviour in Cambridgeshire.

We presented a Home Office Grant Application prepared by Stephen Fitzgerald, ManKind Project Manager for £398,500 to fund a ManKind National Help-line over a three-year period that equates to £131,750 per annum but he immediately told us that our modest application would not be funded. We informed him that domestic abuse was a social problem and, therefore, support and services should be provided to all victims and should be ring-fenced according to proportionate representation.

John Dunworth continued to inform us that there was to be further research as per the British Crime Survey levels on:

- 1) Domestic Violence
- 2) Sexual Crime and Stalking.

Research would be carried out by Bristol University and John also referred to the ACPO (Association of Chief Police Officers) Document Guidance for Investigating Domestic Violence.

Dave Mortimer and Anne Harris both requested that ManKind, running a male domestic violence help-line with 16 No. Voluntary Help-line workers be included in this research, but we were informed that Devon M.A.L.E. would probably be the Home Office choice. Both Dave and Anne pointed out that ManKind were national unlike Devon M.A.L.E. but this did not make any difference.

Anne and Dave then questioned how it would be possible to gain statistics that stood up to public scrutiny without the involvement of ManKind who run a national male domestic violence help-line group.

Dave and Anne pointed out that there is over 30 years of couple relationship studies all showing domestic violence to be a social issue.

Dave Mortimer questioned the collecting techniques i.e. British Crime Surveys – he stated that research was carried out during the day when men were out working. Police figures were also questioned because of including multiple callers.

Anne Harris questioned the lack of professional training. John Dunworth agreed that some police and other professionals including judges who, incidentally the Home Office had no control over, needed training. She spoke of attending Domestic Violence Forums and being shouted down by some professionals only to have others come up to her afterwards saying they agreed with what she said. Anne put this down to government legislation allowing the professionals to speak only between parameters. Although Anne had had this confirmed by parliamentary researchers, John Dunworth would not agree.

Anne commented on ManKind research that showed some female perpetrators were in the caring profession such as nurses, social workers and carers. John Dunworth said that their research showed that some male perpetrators were school teachers and policemen.

Dave spoke briefly about a case history and Anne outlined another case history and the affect it had on a male abuse victim, the children caught up in the abuse and the maternal family who not only have worries of the family member but also have worries about the children living with the perpetrator, namely their mother. The abuse never stops even though the mother remarries. The family try to get help for the children but they are classed as the abusers because it is seen as causing stress for their mother – the ‘powers that be’ have forgotten she is the perpetrator even though knives and hot irons were used in her domestic violence attacks.

Anne and Dave both spoke on youth violence including how young females are becoming more violent. Dave Mortimer said that this could be the outcome of people in the system who are not setting the correct examples because they are not willing to be accountable by their own complaints’ process or the law when they make mistakes. This does not install public faith in them or the system and has the detrimental affect of not teaching respect for the law.

With reference to David Curry’s letter from Baroness Scotland that stated the Supporting Peoples’ Fund (generated from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister) was available to local authorities whose responsibility then was to allocate some of this fund for male refugees and other services, John Dunworth when asked by Dave Mortimer for further clarification on what ‘other services’ meant, stated that it was not there to fund help-lines or refugees. He explained that the Supporting Peoples’ Fund was actually there for individuals to claim costs incurred e.g. housing benefits if they were an abuse victim. Dave Mortimer commented on how the Lighthouse Project funding in his area was distributed (unfairly in his opinion) and Anne Harris stated that the professionals in her area were putting requests in for local grants. Although some of their projects were worthwhile it was actually squeezing out voluntary group grants.

Anne Harris broached the subject of False Allegations made mainly by the mother as she perjures herself in the Family Court to stop the other parent, the father, getting contact. She questioned the message it is sending out to the children that it is OK to lie and falsely accuse a person of being violent.

Anne Harris commented on some arranged ethnic group marriages and the subsequent female false allegations of domestic abuse once they obtain a United Kingdom Passport. This is an immigration problem which has been acknowledged by the ex Home Secretary when he made a statement on national television.

Dave Mortimer questioned the ‘best interest’ principal in the Family Court that means a judge will not question what a mother says. John Dunworth responded by saying that there is no control over the Family Court judges and some are “**bloody barking mad**”. Dave continued to say that domestic violence is a criminal offence and should be heard in the Magistrates Court because it required a burden of proof.

John Dunworth also commented that the police were responsible for collecting credible evidence and are now instructed to deal with every case that has to be treated as a crime scene. When Anne and Dave questioned how on being called out to a domestic abuse incident, do the police know who is actually telling the truth John stated that they will undergo more training.

Anne Harris informed John Dunworth that she had written to Geraint Davies MP in February 2005 to request a meeting with him to discuss a ManKind representative being able to attend the All Party Parliamentary Group on Domestic Violence – she has had no response.

In addition, Anne also requested for ManKind representatives to be included in the Home Office Working With Domestic Violence Specialist Groups. John Dunworth told Anne and Dave that there may be a chance we could participate in a Men’s Forum alongside Respect who run male perpetrator programmes i.e. anger management and Broken Rainbow which is a group for gay, lesbian and transgender men and women. Anne also questioned the Free-phone 24 hour national domestic violence help-line not being in the Telephone Directories. John Dunworth said the help-line was being looked at but he was a bit vague.

Anne Harris also raised the subject of male suicides and when David Mortimer said there are 50 male suicides per week, John Dunworth made a note of this. He asked Dave where his information came from. Dave responded that it was from the ONS Department and although this figure had remained the same for the last 10 years, he had noticed that female suicide over the same period had reduced. Dave asked John could this be that the funding Women’s Aid were given helped towards this year on year reduction. John commented that not all male suicides were necessarily caused by psychological abuse – there were other reasons too.

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Dave Mortimer and Anne Harris questioned the one-sided way that domestic violence information was presented to the public and how this could be justified. Both said that surely the Home Office should ensure that both sides of the story are always presented. John Dunworth said we should use our MPs to raise issues on our behalf. Dave and Anne said they had continually been doing just this over the past 3 years. Dave said his own MP, Mrs Starkey had refused to forward letters to the relevant Ministers making it impossible for him to raise his concerns.

David Mortimer went on to say that when MPs fail to do this groups such as F4J spring up. Anne Harris informed John Dunworth that society is actually creating violent young people who have no respect. Government policies instead of breaking the domestic violence cycle are actually creating more violent people.

We have Homelessness Officers throughout the country looking for refuge spaces for males / males and their children fleeing domestic violence - ManKind have access to six refuge places to offer these abused vulnerable men and their children fleeing abuse. John Dunworth says that if the female partner is the perpetrator she will be asked to leave. We know time and again that this does not happen even if she has stabbed her partner.

John Dunworth stated that refuges are not ideal places for women but will always be necessary. He said he would always support women victims because the violence towards them was greater than that of male victims.

The Female Member of the Home Office Domestic Violence Unit did not comment throughout the whole meeting.

John Dunworth was continually trying to defend the Home Office current position of only helping women and socially excluding men.

Anne Harris / Dave Mortimer, SNAP/MANKIND.
27th April 2005.

----- Original Message -----

From: Suzelle.Dickson@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

To: 'dave.mortimer@tiscali.co.uk'

Cc: John.Dunworth@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

Sent: Wednesday, June 01, 2005 6:20 PM

Subject: Mankind meeting with the Head of the Home Offices' Domestic Violence Team

Dear David,

Thank you for your e-mail of the 25 May regarding the minutes of the meeting held between John and myself and your colleagues. John has asked me to forward on his comments to you in relation to the account of the meeting which has been produced. I am attaching this as a separate document -and these represent the purpose and outcome of the meeting.

Kind Regards
Suzelle Dickson

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Our Ref

Your Ref

Date 1 June 2005

Dear David

Thanks for your note which provides a version of our meeting. As I said at the time, I considered the meeting to be informal and therefore a verbatim record does not reflect the intention or tone of the meeting. Also had we been recording the meeting then it would have been conducted in a very different way. Therefore I cannot agree that your note reflects what was said.

What I propose is that the more general note listed below acts as a record of our meeting

Present:

David Mortimer- Mankind

Anne Harris- Mankind

Suzelle Dickson -Home Office

John Dunworth- Home Office

The meeting was called to discuss the issue of Men as Victims of Domestic Violence. There was consensus that the government accepted that Men were sometimes the victims of domestic violence but there was disagreement about where the emphasis and resources should be directed. There was a discussion about statistics and the evidence base on which domestic violence was being understood. For the government, the British Crime Survey was the most authoritative set of data. David and Ann questioned this.

The issue was raised about training which again there was a consensus that training was needed. John Dunworth outlined proposals that were currently underway with police training, CPS training and training for the Judiciary.

Mankind as an organisation were frustrated that there were no adequate forums at which they could voice concerns or opinions and they felt that the male victims of DV were never given a fair hearing.

There was a discussion about interpersonal violence amongst the young.

There was also a discussion about the lack of services for male victims and the fact that there was no national helpline for male victims as there was for women. Mankind also felt frustrated that they were constantly being unsuccessful in bidding for grants from local authorities.

The meeting also discussed the court process and the problems of false allegations.

Mankind asked to be represented on the government forum looking at specialist interest groups and the men's forum in particular John Dunworth would consider this. There was a discussion about the Men's helpline again and the Home Office said that it was looking into

the issue of men as victims in general and would be conducting a study into this to see how best to intervene and provide services. Mankind asked to be included in the study. This would be considered..

Concluding John Dunworth said that although there is recognition that Domestic Violence demographics is complicated, there is still compelling evidence to suggest that women suffer the greatest harm from domestic violence. Although the government will be making sure that we continue to learn about the nature of domestic violence and how best to support all victims and bring perpetrators to justice.

Yours sincerely

John Dunworth

Head of Domestic Violence Team