



MEN AND EQUALITY IN WALES

FNF Both Parents Matter Cymru is a shared parenting charity working to support parents and grandparents with child contact problems. We also have a remit to support all fathers and father figures to enable them to play a positive role in the lives of the children they care about. Whilst most of the people we help are men, roughly 30% of those who come to us for help are women – and women also make up a majority of our active volunteers.

The charity operates a telephone helpline - Monday to Friday 10am to 7pm (excl. Bank Holidays) and runs monthly face to face support meetings across Wales (there are currently 11 of these from Bangor to Newport and Carmarthen to Queenferry. https://www.fnf-bpm.org.uk/article/support_branches_in_wales-227/index.html)

The charity often finds that our service users report prejudice and discrimination against them from a variety of statutory services eg Police, Children's Services, Family support, Family Courts etc. As a User-led service we have become involved in equalities issues.

In June of this year we were approached by the Welsh Government to run a series of focus groups with men (as a group with protected characteristics under the Equalities Act 2010). The purpose was to gather data for a review of their Equalities Objectives. Somewhat charmingly the Welsh Government freely admitted that they had not engaged with any other organisation or group as representative of men – so I think we may genuinely have helped. The fact that the ratio of men compared to women who committed suicide in Wales in 2013 went above 4:1 may have been a contributory factor to the Welsh Government's recognition of the issues.

The 57 men (and several women) who took part told us a lot about the experience of men around equality – particularly in relation to health, child contact, engaging with public services - especially the police.

Since the focus groups we've looked at equalities issues from a number of angles, engaging now with the Equalities and Human Rights Commission in their draft report – Is Britain Fairer? 2015. The report will be published later this year – but the draft contains a number of areas where equalities issues have negatively impacted on men. One area however gave us cause for concern.

The draft report included a section about the impact of the removal of Legal Aid for family disputes. Based upon the research undertaken by Rights of Women, Women's Aid federation of England and Welsh Women's Aid (<http://rightsofwomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Evidencing-DV-a-year-on-2014.pdf>), the EHRC are suggesting that **women** have found it increasingly difficult to provide the evidence of being a victim of Domestic Violence that is required by the Legal Aid Agency. From our knowledge of the area, based on many hundreds of cases, we suggested that men would find it even more difficult to provide the proof. In response the EHRC asked us to provide 'robust evidence' of our assertion – so, in the absence of any other data we've set up an online survey using most of the questions used by Rights of Women but directed to male victims.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/maleDVvictimssurvey>

One emerging point is that men seem to believe that the term 'Domestic Violence' refers to a serious physical assault. The UK Government don't see it the same way however. The definition of Domestic Violence is stated as:

Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass but is not limited to the following types of abuse:

- Psychological
- Physical
- Sexual
- Financial
- Emotional

Our survey – entitled 'Evidencing Domestic Violence – Men, Legal Aid and family disputes' has been open since the middle of August and we're planning to keep it open until the end of November (although that may change depending on the timescales of the EHRC).

We're keen to encourage men to complete the survey and to ask everyone to pass on the survey to as many men as possible. You can also find the survey on our website at www.fnf-bpm.org.uk at the top left of the home page.

Paul Apreda, National Manager, FNF Both Parents Matter Cymru

August 2015