



PO Box 2220, Bath, BA1 1AA
Tel: 07967 026163
Email: mike@j4mb.org.uk
Web: <http://j4mb.org.uk>

Our public challenge of Polly Neate, CEO, Women's Aid

Polly, I'm writing this to publicly challenge you to retract seven claims made by your spokeswoman in the course of a recent *Telegraph* online discussion. More on this shortly.

Last year Glen Poole of Helping Men <http://helpingmenblog.blogspot.co.uk> published an insightful piece about how men perceive being the victims of partner abuse ('PA'), most notably domestic violence ('DV'):

<http://helpingmenblog.blogspot.co.uk/2013/02/we-need-to-give-men-words-to-talk-about.html>

Firstly, we turn to the most recent figures available on PA/DV in England and Wales, the 2012/13 British Crime Survey ('BCS') published by ONS. The document is here:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/crime-stats/crime-statistics/focus-on-violent-crime-and-sexual-offences--2012-13/rpt---about-this-release.html>

Table 4.03 shows us that 517,000 men suffered one or more incidents of PA in the preceding year, along with 845,000 women. So men represent 38% of individual victims of PA, women 62%. I'll use these numbers in this document.

I hope you would agree with me that refuge places should be made available to people most at risk of facing incidents of severe force at the hands of their partners, regardless of their gender. Table 4.11 of the BCS report has the following statistics for PA victims who'd suffered at least one incident of physical violence in the preceding year:

	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>
Force		
- Minor	20%	26%
- Severe	34%	28%

54% of both male and female victims of PA were subjected to at least one incident of forceful abuse. Men were proportionately markedly more likely than women to have been subjected to severe force. 55% of these people were men, yet we know from Mankind Initiative that fewer than 0.4% of refuge places in the UK are available for heterosexual men (15 places out of a total of 4,000+).

We know that in the minority of cases where DV is one-way, the perpetrators are more likely to be women, and only 4% of female perpetrators cite self-defence as a motivation for their assaults. These points are to be found in a presentation given last year Dr Nicola Graham-Kevan at the Mankind National Conference on Male Victims of Domestic Violence:

<http://j4mb.wordpress.com/2014/05/14/female-perpetrators-of-intimate-partner-violence>

All of which brings me to our public challenge of Women's Aid. Last week Glen Poole made some strong points in an online *Telegraph* discussion with your spokeswoman, Franki Hackett, and a man from The White Ribbon Campaign, about DV. It was hosted by one of the paper's journalists, Emma Barnett. The following link will take you to the discussion, on our YouTube channel. Look for the file dated 28 May 2014:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCKhX1c3ow6BrzdzP3ydpeZQ/videos>

Also in our YouTube library is your recent discussion with Mark Brooks (Mankind Initiative) on *Woman's Hour*. You might like to read the insightful comments posted in response to it.

The *Telegraph* discussion was prompted by the recent Mankind Initiative video showing the public's double standards with respect to male-on-female physical assault, and female-on-male. The video has now been watched by over 6.5 million people:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u3PgH86OyEM>

The following is a critique of some of the claims made by Franki Hackett. We thank a number of individuals – including Glen Poole – for their support in helping us develop this critique.

Ms Hackett's contributions closely followed well-rehearsed party lines, the likes of which we hear from you and your colleagues with monotonous regularity. They reinforce the impression that one of your organisation's prime objectives is maintaining its income streams, which includes opposing the diversion of potential income streams to support male victims of DV. J4MB also opposes diversion of potential income to support female victims, we simply want proportionate support to be made available to male victims.

Ms Hackett claimed, among other questionable things, that:

1. The figure of 40% of victims of DV being male relates to those men's lifetime experience, rather than the preceding 12 month period.
2. The Home Office defines domestic violence as 'a pattern of controlling, coercive and repeated behaviour'.
3. 89% of the people who suffer from a pattern of repeated, controlling, and coercive behaviour, are women.
4. A very large proportion of male victims of DV are suffering at the hands of male partners.
5. There's no evidence that there's been a decline in the number of women being killed by partners or ex-partners.

6. There's no evidence that there's been a decline in the number of women suffering from DV.
7. There's no point in providing services for male victims of DV, as men don't access those services.

We'll be critiquing all these claims in this document, and we publicly challenge you to retract all of them. At 11:20 Emma Barnett started the discussion by making the point that 40% of victims of DV are men, and in response (11:49) Ms Hackett has this to say:

These figures come from the British Crime Survey. The question they ask is, 'Have you ever experienced an incident of physical DV?' and that can be, 'Have you ever in your life had a partner strike you?' So we get the statistic that about 40% of the people who reply 'yes' to that question are men. The problem is, that's not actually DV as it's defined for example by the Home Office, which is a pattern of controlling, coercive and repeated behaviour. 89% of the people who experience that are women, so actually when the video says 40% of the people who experience DV are men, it's being quite misleading.

It's using statistics in a way that doesn't really capture the reality of DV which *is* gendered, which *does* happen more to women. And of course the other thing is, quite a lot of the men who are experiencing DV will be experiencing it from male partners. So it's not the case that this is female violence against men all the time, a *very* large proportion is male violence against men.

The claim that DV is gendered is, of course, *ridiculous*, and disproved many years ago. It's long been known that women are as physically aggressive or more aggressive than men towards intimate partners, and if anyone should doubt that, they should check this out:

<http://j4mb.wordpress.com/domestic-violence-women-are-as-physically-aggressive-as-or-more-aggressive-than-men-in-their-relationships-with-intimate-partners/>

Let's consider the claims made by Ms Hackett in the section just cited:

- 1. The figure of 40% of victims of DV being male relates to those men's lifetime experience, rather than the preceding 12 month period.**

Wrong. The figure – 38%, in fact – comes from the 2012/13 BCS, Table 4.03, and refers to the preceding 12 month period.

- 2. The Home Office defines domestic violence as 'a pattern of controlling, coercive and repeated behaviour'.**

Wrong again. The statement conflicts with how Woman's Aid itself defines DV on its website:

Women's Aid uses the Home Office definition of domestic violence which is, '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.'

By this definition, even one ‘incident’ is – quite rightly – considered DV.

3. 89% of the people who suffer from a pattern of repeated, controlling, and coercive behaviour, are women.

Wrong again. We believe Ms Hackett’s figure of 89% is derived from a report (Walby & Allen) published in 2004, which referred to individuals who’d been abused four or more times in the preceding year. Women’s Aid has a long and inglorious history of using old reports and studies to support its narratives, when the majority of more recent reports and studies *don’t* support them. We believe more reliable statistics are to be found in the 2012/13 BCS report, given that we know that men are far less likely than women to report being victims of PA/DV. Appendix table 4.12 provides data on ‘Number of times victims (adults aged 16 – 59) of partner abuse had been abused by partner(s) in the last year’:

	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>	<u>All</u>
Once	22%	19%	20%
More than once	27%	30%	29%
Twice	6%	9%	8%
Three to five times	13%	8%	10%
Between 6 and 20 times	4%	8%	7%
Between 21 and 49 times	1%	2%	2%
More than 50 times / too many to count	3%	3%	3%
Don’t know	19%	11%	14%
Don’t wish to answer	32%	39%	37%
<i>Unweighted base</i>	280	772	1,052

(Note that 51% of abused men and 50% of abused women either didn’t know how often they’d been abused in the previous year, or didn’t wish to answer.)

The Walby & Allen study provided data on people who’d suffered four or more incidents of partner abuse in the preceding year, and the nearest we can come to this figure in the 2012/13 BCS report is three or more incidents. 21% of men and 21% of women suffer three or more incidents. Even if we take six or more incidents as our starting point, we find 8% of men and 13% of women affected. The claim that 89% of victims of ‘controlling, coercive and repeated behaviour’ are women simply isn’t supported by recent studies and reports.

4. A very large proportion of male victims of DV are suffering at the hands of male partners.

Wrong again. In England and Wales today there are around 16.15 million men (16 – 59, the age range covered by the BCS abuse statistics). Various estimates have been made by the government of the proportion of men who are gay, and they’ve fallen in the range 1.5% - 5.0%. For the purpose of this analysis, we’ll take a figure halfway between the two extremes, 3.25%. That leads to estimates of 15,625,125 heterosexual men, and 524,875 gay men.

The following government report provides data on PA suffered by both heterosexual and homosexual men and women – Table 3.07, on page 76:

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110218135832/http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs10/hosb0110.pdf>

It shows the following proportions of men and women were victims of PA in the preceding year, 2008/9:

	<u>Gay/lesbian</u>	<u>Heterosexual</u>
Men	8.9%	4.1%
Women	17.3%	6.6%

This leads us to the following figures for abused men (16 – 59) in 2008/9:

Gay men: $8.9\% \times 524,875 = 46,713$

Heterosexual men: $4.1\% \times 15,625,125 = 640,630$

Heterosexual men represent 92.7% of the male victims of PA, gay men just 7.3%. We remind you that Ms Hackett stated with supreme confidence, ‘A very large proportion of male victims of DV are suffering at the hands of male partners’.

In a later part of the discussion, starting at 27:32, attention turned to the trend in DV over time. Ms Hackett had this to say after 28:04:

It’s very difficult to get a measure on how much DV there is – I think we all know about the problem of police reporting statistics. The only objective measure we have, unfortunately, is the number of people killed. Yes, OK, it went down last year, but if you look at the five-year averages and the ten-year averages, we’re seeing two women a week killed, and we’ve seen that for the past few *decades*, unfortunately. That’s not really budging. So it’s really hard to say that the levels of DV are getting better in any way.

Wrong again. It’s patently ridiculous to assert, ‘It’s very difficult to get a measure on how much DV there is’ when we have *plenty* of data on the matter from the BCS and many other sources. This brings us to the final three claims made by Ms Hackett:

5. There’s no evidence that there’s been a decline in the number of women being killed by partners or ex-partners.

Wrong again. The number has been in decline for *decades*. In May 2013 the organisation ‘Full Fact’ cited ONS statistics and produced a graph showing that over the course of a decade (2001/2 – 2011/12) the number of women killed by partners had declined from 118 to 88 – **a fall of 25.4%**:

http://fullfact.org/factchecks/women_deaths_domestic_violence-28942

6. There's no evidence that there's been a decline in the number of women suffering from DV.

Wrong again. The *Guardian* columnist and blogger Ally Fogg wrote the following piece in February 2013:

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/feb/07/uk-safer-party-politics-crime-statistics>

From the article:

Despite our economic woes, our society is continuing to become less violent and crime-stricken. According to the Crime Survey of England and Wales (the successor to the BCS) the number of violent incidents is now exactly half what it was in 1995, and overall the rates are more or less where they were in 1981. Homicides are at their lowest since 1989. Firearms offences have fallen for the eighth consecutive year. **Domestic abuse is down 69% since the mid-90s.** (my emphasis)

7. There's no point in providing services for male victims of DV, as men don't access those services.

Glen Poole made the good point in the *Telegraph* debate that the problem here lies in the services, not the abused men. While abused men and abused women have some reasons in common for not accessing support, and refuge places in particular, some of the reasons are different, so support services need to be different. The following reasons for not seeking support (or refuge places) are more common for abused men than abused women:

- Where men have children, they fear (with good reason) that if they leave the home, the children will become the subject of abuse (or more abuse).
- Men fear (with good reason) that if they leave the home, not only are they unlikely to be able to return to that home, they may never see their children again. A woman who abuses her partner is likely to deny him access to his children after he leaves the home, and the family court system has a woeful record in enabling men to have reasonable access to their children where malicious ex-partners wish to deny it.
- In the majority of cases where DV is one-directional, the perpetrators are women, the victims men. In 2012 Mankind Initiative reported that in England and Wales just 15 refuge places were available for heterosexual men, so for most men both availability of places and geographical proximity to a refuge could be a problem (especially if they need to live near their workplace). 4,000+ places were available for women. So 38% of victims of DV are men, the vast majority of them heterosexual, yet fewer than 0.38% of refuge places are available for them.
- It's well-known that refuge places for abused women exist, it's *not* well known that *any* places for men exist. Men aren't going to seek something they don't know exists.

We look forward to your response to this public challenge to retract the seven claims we've critiqued in this piece, and we'll publish your response on <http://j4mb.org.uk>. Thank you.

[Update 6 June 2014: Polly Neate responded speedily to this public challenge, but as we'd half-expected, it was a contemptuous response. This is our exchange of emails so far:

PN: Thank you for your email. I will bear your thoughts in mind.

MB: Polly, thank you, but I have no idea what you mean by that. Are you, or are you not, prepared to formally respond to this challenge?

PN: I think I've already made Women's Aid's position clear in public, on *Woman's Hour* and elsewhere.

MB: Thank you Polly. So one of your spokeswomen lies and makes a misleading statement and your response is to do precisely NOTHING?]