

## Mothers' Union and Domestic Violence

Domestic abuse is any kind of abuse that happens within the household or between people in an intimate relationship but not necessarily living together. It can take many forms, but almost always involves an element of controlling or coercive behaviour. If you, or anyone you know is suffering from domestic violence there is help out there . . .

Domestic abuse is part of the wider scope of gender-based violence, and many of those who are affected by it are targeted because of their gender. Gender-based violence against women and girls is more prevalent; but directed towards men it is just as serious.

Perpetrators carry out their abuse in different ways including controlling behaviour, physical and sexual abuse, emotional abuse, financial abuse and isolating you from family and friends. FGM and forced marriage is now also considered as domestic abuse. For the sufferer domestic violence is devastating.

The problem is much bigger than official statistics. Many cases of domestic violence are not recorded, so they are not recorded as crimes. Many children do not talk about physical or mental abuse, because they are afraid of any consequences that may arise within the family.

Each year some 1.9 million people suffer some form of domestic violence (1.3 million women and 600,000 men). Each year some 100,000 people are in fear of their lives or being seriously injured. Far more women are likely to be the sufferers than men. Seven women a month are killed by a current or former partner. Many thousands of children live in homes where there is a high risk of domestic violence.

On average people at risk go over two years before reporting the violence and seeking help.

Many sufferers attend A&E before getting help. They can experience short term injuries and long term physical health problems. Many differing medical problems may manifest themselves including bladder and kidney infections muscular problems, gastro-intestinal problems, migraines, gynaecological problems, STI's and pregnancy difficulties.

Then there are the mental impacts, with mental health issues, attempted suicides, self-harming and other psychological issues including low self-esteem, flashbacks and sleep disorders.

Three women a week take their own lives because of domestic violence.

Mothers' Union members will march to Downing Street to hand in a petition that, they trust, will force the Government to reconsider the rules for survivors of domestic violence (abuse). The petition highlights problems with the current child maintenance payment system which could force survivors of domestic violence to engage with a former partner, the very perpetrator who carried out the abuse against them.

Mothers' Union is campaigning for survivors to be exempt from the 'collect and pay' charges imposed for using the statutory Child Maintenance Service, as they may have no other option to receive or make payments for their children without further risk of control, abuse or violence.

Thousands of survivors could be at risk if they were put off from using the Child Maintenance Service because of the charges. Figures show that one in three applicants to the CMS has experienced domestic violence. Under this system survivors of abuse will pay an automatic 4 per cent levy, equivalent to an average of £130, which may not sound a lot to some but may be devastating for a mum who then struggles to pay for her child's school expenses for the year. The new system puts pressure on women to use the family-based arrangement, or direct pay, which may result in continuing contact with an abusive ex-partner."

Victims have described their experience; "I have been in that position, and it can be hard to manage on a limited income. My ex told social services that he gave the children pocket money and this amount was promptly taken from my support. I could not believe what happened but he thought it funny". Another said: "I know how long it takes in many cases of relationship breakdown for any chance at respectful communication to take place. Right at the beginning is when payments are so important.

Prior to the march, Mothers' Union members from around the world will also light candles and take part to stand alongside and support and pray for the millions of women (and men!) who suffer domestic violence in its many forms, and which has reached endemic proportions in many parts of the world.

A Mothers' Union's spokesperson, said; "Mothers Union founder Mary Sumner, refused to accept injustice for women. Similarly, in this generation, women, families and communities are suffering because of practices that fuel prejudice and result in hardship for thousands of vulnerable women."

Today's activities form part of a major Mothers' Union campaign, to shine the light on gender based violence with the clear message that 'It's Not OK'. The campaign will highlight the many forms that Domestic violence takes from controlling behaviour by a partner, to rape as a weapon of war.

Globally, the campaign will call on governments and leaders to ensure that national, local and customary laws prohibit all forms of violence against women. The campaign will also call for survivors to have access to justice and support services, and that perpetrators are prosecuted.

We must pray for sufferers and victims of domestic violence:

*Heavenly Father, move amongst the earth to change attitudes that promote, accept and perpetuate domestic violence. Give women, girls and people experiencing all forms of violence - courage, hope, comfort and a way to break free from their abuse and abusers. They need Your help, and love so much . . . Please protect children who witness violence in the home. Their home should be a sanctuary and a place of love and peace. May they have support to enable them to lead positive lives, without fear.  
Through Jesus Christ, Our Lord. Amen*