

Silent victims: Men now make up a quarter of domestic abuse sufferers

Charities warn that social stigma still stops victims from seeking help

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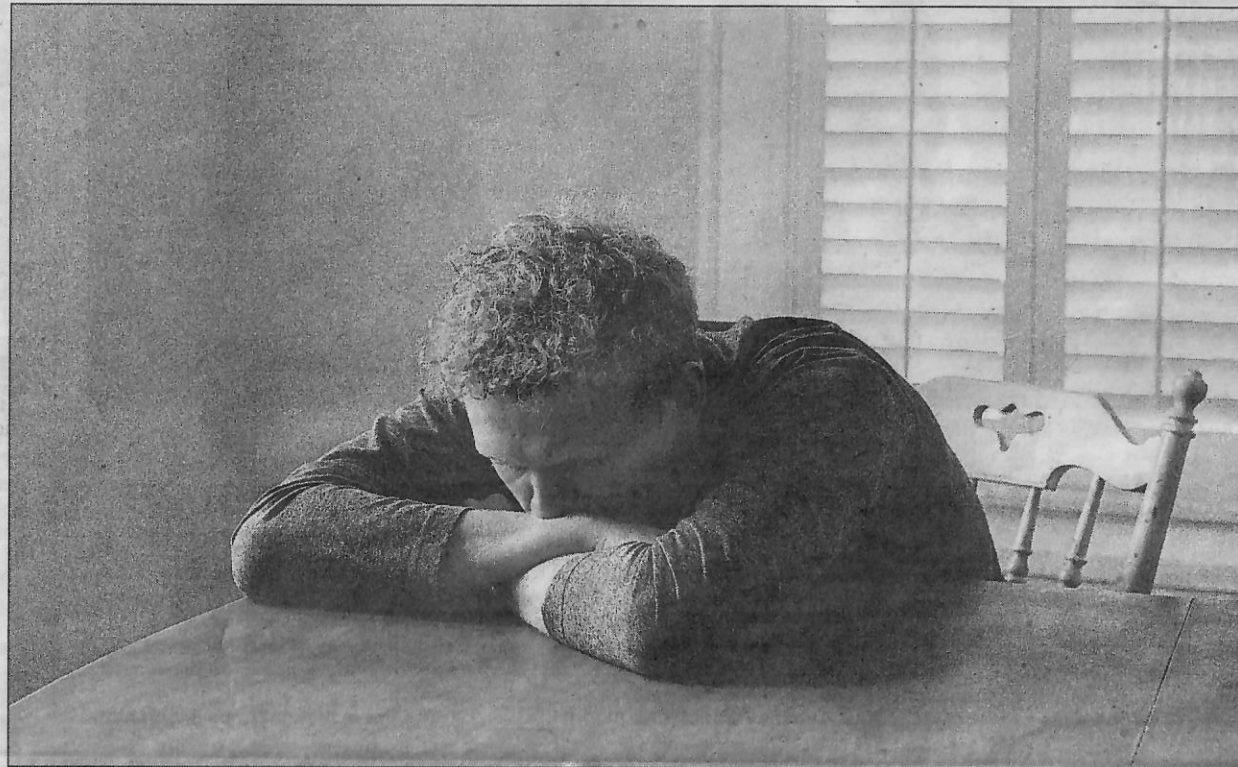
A QUARTER of all reports of domestic abuse made to police in Oxfordshire last year were about men being victims, latest figures have revealed.

A total of 2,768 calls to Thames Valley Police between January and October were either from men and boys saying that they had been abused or from worried friends and relatives.

However, the proportion of men and boys contacting local domestic abuse support services is still only four per cent.

Now, a charity which runs an abuse helpline for men has warned that the Oxfordshire figures could be just the 'tip of the iceberg' and that more needs to be done to help men speak out.

Mark Brooks, chairman of the Mankind Initiative, said: "What the figures clearly show is that there is



Men are being encouraged to share their experiences of domestic abuse. Picture: Andrew Neel

Efforts to boost oral health for care home staff and residents

CARE home staff and residents across Oxfordshire will be able to get additional help to improve their oral health with a new on-line toolkit.

Designed by Oxfordshire County Council, in collaboration with Community Dental Services (CDS), it aims to improve oral health and offer practical advice to those who live and work in care settings.

Dr Eunan O'Neil, consultant in public health at the council said: "Good oral health is a key contributing factor in both our mental and physical wellbeing, regardless of age or situation."

He added: "This toolkit will help us to ensure that those who may need additional support with their mouth care, such as those who reside in residential care, are properly supported by our workforce."

The online oral health toolkit was developed by the council and CDS to improve skills and knowledge of care home staff around the importance of daily mouth care as well as practical advice for those people who are dependent or need assistance in oral care techniques.

It can be used and accessed at a convenient time for all staff, and designed to fit in with shifts

said: "What the figures clearly show is that there is a significant number of men who are victims of domestic abuse within the county: they make up one in four of all victims of domestic abuse."

"That is obviously a concern, however it also shows that men are coming forward to the police to report their crimes or report what is happening to them."

"The big challenge is whether this is the tip of the iceberg: how many of those men are receiving the practical help to enable them to escape from the abusive relationships they are in?"

In total, Thames Valley Police (TVP) recorded 11,304 domestic abuse-related occurrences between the start of January and the end of October last year.

Of those reports, 2,768 – or 25.48 per cent – were about men being victims, and the rest were about women as victims.

The divide is the same as the national level.

However, Mr Brooks warned that the proportion of men contacting local domestic abuse services across the country is still only four per cent.

He added: "One in 25 of people accessing local domestic abuse support services is male, hence it is important that, while we encourage more men to come forward, there still needs to be far more practical support to enable them to eventually escape."

A2Dominion is a housing agency that has thousands

Men are being encouraged to share their experiences of domestic abuse. Picture: Andrew Neel



Mark Brooks

of properties across Oxfordshire, and also runs a support service for people in the county who are victims of domestic or sexual abuse.

In Oxfordshire, it said just 82 out of the 1,485 referrals made to its service between January and October were men.

That means men account for 6.2 per cent of all referrals, which is two per cent higher than the national average.

However, that number of referrals is still 18 per cent lower than the number of alleged male victims according to the Thames Valley Police figures.

Experts have said the low number of men being referred to domestic abuse victim support services is cause for concern.

Mr Brooks said: "The lack of male victims being referred to the county's specialist domestic abuse services is a real concern given

the police figures.

"This is an issue that the police, councils and health services have to address because it suggests men are not being signposted or are not aware of the expert help that is available."

We asked Mr Brooks why fewer men come forward.

He said: "Many men worry about coming forward because they feel ashamed of being a victim at the hands of a woman and also fear not being taken seriously."

"It is why more awareness campaigns, to encourage more men to come forward, is vital."

Jo Evans, director of supported housing at A2Dominion, said: "If you're experiencing domestic abuse, what you are going through is not your fault, and you can still seek help during the current national lockdown."

"Regardless of your gender, we can help you with practical advice and support via our helpline and provide a safe place to stay if you need to leave your home."

"You can find advice online at a2dominion.co.uk, or by contacting our helpline on 0800 731 0055 from 10am - 7pm on weekdays. If you're in immediate danger, call 999."

During the first lockdown, between March 23 and July 3 last year, the total number of reports of domestic abuse to Thames Valley Police rose by more than 10 per cent compared to the same pe-

riod the previous year.

Reducing the Risk of Domestic Abuse, a charity based in Oxfordshire, also saw a 55 per cent increase in referrals in the first six months of 2020 compared to the same period in 2019.

Government guidelines for victims of domestic abuse during this third national lockdown state that if you need to escape your home due to violence or domestic abuse, the rules around coronavirus do not apply.

Thames Valley Police said it 'urged' people to raise the alarm in any way they could. Detective Superintendent Becky Mears, head of Thames Valley Police's protecting vulnerable people department, said: "We continually work hard to encourage people to report incidents to us. Domestic Abuse affects people from a wide range of age, genders, faith, and communities."

"It is important that we give people the confidence to make a report and we work closely with a number of partner agencies in order to do so."

"There is a wide range of specialist support available to anyone who makes a report. Tackling domestic abuse is a priority at all times."

Anyone trapped at home with their abuser can report domestic abuse silently and discretely by calling 999 then pressing 55: the operator will then raise the alarm.

It can be used and accessed at a convenient time for all staff, and designed to fit in with shifts.



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