

Inquiry into Suicide Prevention

Ymchwiliad i Atal Hunanladdiad

Ymateb gan Both Parents Matter Cymru

Response from Both Parents Matter Cymru



CONSULTATION RESPONSE TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES - HEALTH, SOCIAL CARE AND SPORT COMMITTEE ON SUICIDE PREVENTION

SUBMITTED BY

Paul Apreada, National Manager – [REDACTED]

ABOUT US

1. FNF Both Parents Matter Cymru is a children's rights charity that provides information, advice and assistance to parents and grandparents with child contact difficulties in Wales. We have recently become a specialist domestic violence support service primarily for men where child contact issues are an element in the abuse they are suffering. The charity also provides the secretariat to the Welsh Assembly Cross Party Group on Fathers and Fatherhood.
2. The charity provides 10 face to face support meetings across Wales – from Carmarthen to Mold and from Bangor to Newport. The meetings provide guided peer emotional and practical support to overcome the pain and suffering of being excluded or marginalised from children and family life.
3. Attendance at the charity's meetings is around 1,000 each year, while our helpline answers about 900 calls.

SUMMARY

4. Suicide is a men's issue. Until the focus of suicide prevention is directed to men – particularly in their middle years - the Welsh Government will continue to waste time, effort and resources on poorly thought out strategies that have little impact on the underlying causes of suicidal behaviour.
5. Talk to me 2 is unfocussed and ineffective as it seems to deliberately ignore the fundamental evidence that suicide is a problem faced by men. The recent Samaritan's report 'Dying of Inequality' does recognise the higher rate of suicidal behaviour in men but fails to provide the focus on this group in an effective way that would bring about change. Our charity has sought to engage with Samaritans Cymru, the National Advisory Group for Talk to me 2 and with the regional fora. Sadly our offers of collaboration have been ignored or turned down.

6. It can only be hoped that the recent tragic suicide at the heart of Welsh Government will provide a spur to re-evaluate their strategies. Many of our service users express the view that men die because the Welsh Government cares little for them.

OUR EVIDENCE

7. We are confident that the committee will be aware of the ONS data showing the prevalence of suicide amongst men with preponderance towards those in the 41-50 age group. This group represents the largest single age group amongst our service users (39% are aged 40-49)
8. The majority (currently 57%) of our service users identify that they are victims of domestic abuse (typically emotional abuse). We suspect that this is an under-reporting based on their lack of understanding of the Cross Governmental definition of Domestic Violence and Abuse.
9. The charity dealt with the second instance of suicide in a service user in November 2017. A review of the circumstances has identified that we need to develop an improved response to service users who disengage when the circumstances of their child contact dispute degenerate. We are urgently seeking funding to improve our ability to respond pro-actively.
10. The failure to recognise the link between the male experience of domestic abuse and suicidal behaviour risks further illustrates the lack of interest in supporting men that is a consistent feature of Welsh Government policy.
11. The abuse that they suffer is linked to the issue of child contact denial that has a very significant impact on their mental health and well-being. From January 2018 we will be incorporating assessments using the Short Warwick-Edinburgh wellbeing scale as well as the de Jong Gierveld loneliness scale to map the difficulties faced by our service users against the Outcomes set out in the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, as well as monitoring 'distance travelled' through engaging with our service.
12. Our charity is building links with mental health teams across South Wales to offer help and support to individuals who present to the crisis teams where they identify that child contact is a significant issue for them.
13. The response that the charity is able to give to our service users is significantly hampered by a lack of funding and a lack of recognition by most public services of the problems faced by men in relation to family life.
14. Our primary source of data around the issues of suicidal ideation comes from the Welsh Dads survey 2017. This is a piece of research undertaken by our charity that seeks to engage a wide spectrum of fathers and father figures to discover their experience of being a father in Wales primarily in relation to their engagement with statutory services. The Welsh Dads survey <https://www.fnf->

bpm.org.uk/image/upload/branch/cymru/WELSH_DADS_SURVEY_2017_report_FIN_AL.pdf received a total of 419 responses with every Local Authority represented.

15. The 2017 survey contained a new question looking at Emotional Well-being and Mental Health. The question was answered by 353 respondents.
16. We identified a number of indicators of poor mental health and asked respondents whether they had experienced any of them. Respondents could identify with multiple indicators.
17. The single largest response was that men had talked about low mood with friends, family and colleagues (41.36%) Unsurprisingly the second highest response (41.08%) came for the 'None of the above' indicator – pointing to the fact that most men don't recognise any significant problems in their role as a father.
18. Significantly more worrying was the high number (75 representing 21.25% of respondents) who stated that they 'felt suicidal and unable to cope'. In the detailed comments a significant number of respondents used the word 'suicide' or 'suicidal' overwhelmingly when they also identified child contact difficulties following separation.
19. Many of the comments left by respondents show the huge difficulties placed upon men who are being excluded from family life following divorce or separation. They also tell us that services primarily funded by Welsh Government show little interest in engaging with them as fathers. We believe that allowing these men to speak directly about their feelings will be the most effective contribution our charity can make to this inquiry. The survey – unlike the regular work of the charity – captures the voices of all fathers and father figures, not simply those who are separated and have child contact problems.
20. Comments received in the Emotional Well-being section identified Mind as a very valuable source of help, whilst GP services were rather less favourably viewed.
21. We do not believe that the Welsh Government's Talk to Me 2 strategy is helpful. We contrast the gender –neutral focus with that of the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence National Strategy that prioritises women as victims / survivors and ignores men completely in identifying 'priority groups'. We note that there is a higher prevalence of male suicide compared to female victims of domestic violence illustrating a clear 'empathy gap' in the way that Welsh Government views these issues and a lack of interest in issues that impact largely on men.
22. In writing this consultation response we reviewed our previous response to the Talk to Me 2 strategy from 2015 and found the experience deeply depressing as no improvement has been made to address the fundamental underlying problems with the strategy has been evident.
23. We also wish to draw the attention of the Committee to the testimony of Erin Pizzey who campaigns to end domestic violence and abuse who spoke about male suicide at a recent event in the Senedd <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ctdYHoMmJqs>

FATHERS VOICES – Welsh Dads survey 2017

24. *'The pressure on fathers is immense. My wife had help with her PND but I have received no help at all with the stresses associated with coping with work, childcare and looking after a wife with PND. Fathers are forgotten about. We are told that a modern man is sensitive and*

it's ok to show emotion yet we are, at the same time, expected to cope with all the family's issues and just get on with it. It's no wonder suicide rates are higher in young men - the expectations are enormous.'

25. *'Everyone assumes that dads can cope, sometimes we can't, there appears to be plenty of emotional support for mums but very little for dads. We're expected to shrug everything off & just carry on working, supporting the mother and helping to look after the baby. At first it's very hard'*
26. *'I have undergone counselling and have also undertaken a stress and anxiety course with Cardiff Mind - both very useful. I feel that wider society do not understand or care about stress, anxiety in fathers and do not care about children having a meaningful relationship with their father after a marriage has broken down.'*
27. *'I was too scared to seek help in case it made me look bad while I was fighting for access, my ex-wife would have used it against me and made me out to be unstable.'*
28. *'Unless you have experienced it you cannot imagine the heartache of being apart from your children. I have gone through all of the above emotions. When you have a mother who is a parental alienator it is devastating for your children and yourself.'*
29. *'I've talked about these issues enough. Every waking moment can be turned to the thoughts of the ongoing abuse my children, my family, and I, suffer at the hands of my former partner. Abuse that is enabled by a wholly inadequate and discriminatory system.'*
30. *'When my wife left she ran with the children to her boyfriends and would call saying "kill yourself" and I would never see the kids again and that was a lot for me. The kids mean the world to me.'*
31. *'I attempted suicide ten years ago when my ex-wife told me if I didn't hand the house over to her she would tell enough lies to ensure I never saw my children again'*
32. *'It's been about 6 years now since seeing her every night. I wake up thinking about her. I cannot sleep. I have sat in my car many a time wanted to end it all. I take things out on my wife I have to go to work but when I am home spend a lot of time on my own up all night. When in work I put on a face they don't know the half of it'*
33. *I feel like ending it all sometimes because the system of the family court, Cafcass and others help the mother behave appallingly and do not intervene when she is trying to stop me from seeing the children. It's a tragedy that I am being exploited and controlled by my ex telling me when I can have the children etc. otherwise she'll stop contact. I can't take it anymore.*
34. *Having my children taken away from me. I was very close to my sons. Then having 42 allegations against me just so that she could get legal aid. Suicide seemed the best option. Twice I tried to hang myself and once I stood on a railway track. The Samaritans talked me off the track.*
35. *I never stop thinking about taking my own life. There is NO help available. I just want to share my daughters' lives, that's all. I don't want to be told I'm depressed etc etc. I know that. My life has become totally impossible. I never did anything wrong. I have lost my entire family who have chosen to believe my Ex's lies and my children's not wishing to see me being my own fault. I am completely alone and will almost certainly kill myself at some point; which, as all the mental Health specialists acknowledge, would be a perfectly rational and reasonable thing to do. Its only about....when?*

SUBMISSION ENDS