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UK Statistics Authority  
(Regulation)

2nd March 2023

cc: [statistics@London.gov.uk](mailto:statistics@London.gov.uk)

REPLY ADDRESS:  
[chair@menandboyscoalition.org.uk](mailto:chair@menandboyscoalition.org.uk)

Dear Sir / Madam

**Re: Serious Statistical errors**

**BODY: Mayor of London's Office / MOPAC**

**DOCUMENT: 'Ending Gender Based Violence and Abuse in Young People's Relationships – Teacher's Toolkit' (Published December 2022.)**

**RETRIEVED FROM: <https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2022-11/Ending%20GBV%20toolkit%20FINAL.pdf>**

I would like to flag serious errors in the above document, recently published by the London Mayor's Office. As I understand it, GLA and associated bodies, including MOPAC, voluntarily subscribe to the UK Statistics Authority Code of Practice. I would like you to consider that the issues raised constitute clear breaches of the code. Given that the errors are contained in a document targeted to teachers and schools, containing information that is expressly published to be relayed to children, and given the importance, sensitivity and public interest in the issues involved, I would ask you to consider recommending immediate withdrawal of the relevant document and a corrected, revised edition to be published.

All issues relate to the circumstances, extent and nature of intimate and abusive crimes against men and boys, particularly with regard to acknowledgement of risks to boys and young men themselves.

#### **ISSUE 1**

##### **Page 6 – 'Young people and gender based abuse'**

EXTRACT: *"SafeLives Children's Insights data found that nearly all (95%) of young people experiencing intimate partner violence were female, and that the majority of those perpetrating the abuse were male (94%)"*

This claim is grossly misleading and drawn from an inappropriate source. It is clearly intended to be taken at face value, to 'explain' that 95% of young people experiencing intimate partner violence are female and 94% of perpetrators are male. However, the link provided is to the user data for one

specialized ‘whole-family’ intervention service working with some of the most extreme and dangerous abuse cases. The percentages quoted above describe this particular service’s user group, a sample of only 53 cases that are not in any way representative of wider populations.

The document from which the statistics are taken includes repeated cautions **not** to consider the statistics to be representative. For example, the data page containing the numbers quoted includes the following: *“The sample size and method of data collection places a number of limitations on the conclusions we can draw from Insights data, as set out below. Care has been taken to use this data alongside other sources of information when producing the findings set out in this report... The small size of the children’s datasets mean that caution should be taken in generalising findings to the wider population.” (p46)*

*SafeLives Children’s Insights data found that nearly all (95%) of young people experiencing intimate partner violence were female, and that the majority of those perpetrating the abuse were male (94%). This may reflect the gender asymmetry at the most severe end of abuse; the NSPCC study found that girls were three times as likely as boys to report repeated severe physical violence. However, this could also suggest that boys who experience intimate partner abuse are less visible to services. (p18)*

<https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Safe%20Young%20Lives%20web.pdf>

None of the caveats or limitations to this data are mentioned in the Mayor’s Toolkit publication.

It is highly noteworthy that the same SafeLives Insight Data report uses the following research to convey a more accurate and representative statistic: *“A study of 13 to 17 year olds by NSPCC suggests this abuse can begin even earlier in adolescence for large numbers of young people. A quarter (25%) of girls and 18% of boys in the study reported having experienced some form of physical violence from an intimate partner.”*

The same research finding was quoted by the Department of Education in 2015 in the document ‘Teen Abuse – A Teacher’s Guide.’

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/506524/teen-abuse-teachers-guide.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/506524/teen-abuse-teachers-guide.pdf)

It would appear that the authors of the Mayor’s Toolkit have willfully chosen to include statistics which were published with explicit warnings **not** to be used as they were, while excluding other statistics from the very same page which had been explicitly listed as more representative research.

## ISSUE 2

### Teacher’s Toolkit, p36 ‘Activity 1 – Statistics corner’

EXTRACTS: *“A large proportion of male victim-survivors have been in same sex relationships so that the perpetrator is male (adding to the gendered nature of VAWG)...*

*“Please ensure that you also acknowledge that violence and abuse can also happen in same-sex relationships - 49% of gay men have experienced at least one incident of domestic abuse from a family member or partner since the age of 16 (Stonewall, 2017). Research conducted by Galop in 2017 found that the gender of perpetrator in relationship abuse was as follows: 71% of individual perpetrators were identified as male and 29% as female. This adds to the gendered nature of VAWG – the perpetrators being male.”*

This repeated claim, that a ‘large proportion of male victim-survivors have been in same sex relationships and so the perpetrator is male’ is categorically false and is not supported by any

credible research. The last figure to be fully reported by ONS / CSEW on perpetrator sex (to March 2018) showed that only 1% of male relationship abuse victims reported having been victimised by another man, compared to 61% by a woman, 4.4% by both men and women, (with 33.6% either 'don't know' or refused to answer.)

The statistics reported in the Teacher's Toolkit above - describing 'the gender of perpetrator in relationship abuse' as 71% male – is taken from the user data of the charity Galop. Galop is the domestic abuse support service for LGBT people. Their male service users are gay, bi and trans men, so obviously their abusive partners will very commonly be other men.

At no point in the Teachers Toolkit is this explained, so any reader who was not fully familiar with Galop as a charity would be led to believe that 71% of perpetrators of *all* domestic abuse against men are other men.

This is not only an egregious statistical falsehood on its own terms, but by sheer scale of numbers it is implying that gay, bi and trans men are at least 20 times as likely to be violent to their partners as heterosexual men, and so should be considered highly homophobic and discriminatory. ONS statistics show that LGBT men are slightly more likely to have been victims of domestic abuse than heterosexual men, (6% vs 3.5%) however these numbers include familial violence from parents, siblings etc. There is no credible evidence to suggest gay men are disproportionately likely to perpetrate relationship violence.

### **ISSUE 3: Trustworthiness of Statistics (Honesty and Integrity)**

Throughout the Teachers Toolkit there are numerous allusions to statistical claims which are not referenced and so which cannot be directly challenged but which nonetheless combine to create a false narrative about the experiences and prevalence of male victims of intimate and sexual violence and in particular, relationship abuse. I would ask you to consider whether these are sufficiently serious to be considered breaches of the Code of Conduct's requirements to be truthful, impartial and independent, and meet consistent standards of behaviour that reflect the wider public good.

In particular, I would ask you to look at the opening paragraph to the section on page 36, not least because it is explicitly titled '*Activity 1: Statistics Corner*'

*EXTRACT: "In Britain 1 in 3 women will experience abuse in a relationship sometime during their lifetime and 1 in 7 men have experienced some form of domestic abuse (ONS, 2019). Where men are victim-survivors, they are less likely to experience a pattern of abuse, it is more likely to be a one-off incident. Some men and boys report that when they have been a victim-survivor of abuse it does not have the same impact and cause the same sense of fear. A large proportion of male victim-survivors have been in same sex relationships so that the perpetrator is male (adding to the gendered nature of VAWG). When women are the perpetrator there is substantial evidence to support the case that it is after being a victim-survivor in the relationship themselves and have sustained prolonged domestic abuse (Women's Aid, 2018)."*

In broad terms, it seems that the only purpose of this paragraph is to minimise and marginalize the extent and seriousness of abuse against males. That alone should raise significant concerns. It is also a succession of mistruths and misrepresentations. Taking each claim in turn:

*"Where men are victim-survivors, they are less likely to experience a pattern of abuse, it is more likely to be a one-off incident."*

This claim may be true but is misleading. ONS statistics suggest that a large majority of domestic abuse incidents are one-off incidents, whether the victim is female or male. While it is true that

female victims are more likely to experience multiple repeated victimisations, there is no source for the claim that they are 'less likely to experience a pattern of abuse' and no way of establishing whether the difference claimed is large or marginal, which would significantly alter the meaning and validity of the claim. I submit that the claim here is prejudicial, wilfully minimising the harms and dangers of domestic abuse against men.

*"Some men and boys report that when they have been a victim-survivor of abuse it does not have the same impact and cause the same sense of fear."*

This claim is entirely unsourced and unevidenced and should be considered questionable, if not downright spurious. It is very well evidenced in qualitative research that male victims of domestic abuse (especially younger men) commonly minimise or attempt to 'laugh off' abusive experiences, because to admit to having been hurt can be considered demasculating and humiliating. Even as a qualitative claim, many professionals supporting male victims of abuse would consider this sentence to be enormously offensive, prejudicial and damaging, and at the very least it has no place in a paragraph that is titled 'statistics' – thereby lending it a weight of authority that is entirely undeserved. It is very clearly written to minimise the seriousness of abuse against men and boys.

*"A large proportion of male victim-survivors have been in same sex relationships..."*

This has been addressed in Issue 2, above.

*"When women are the perpetrator there is substantial evidence to support the case that it is after being a victim-survivor in the relationship themselves and have sustained prolonged domestic abuse"*

Again, this claim has no supporting source and it is entirely inappropriate to include this claim in a section titled 'Statistics.' It would certainly be considered highly prejudicial and offensive by male survivors and their representatives, not least because it 'victim-blames' male survivors of domestic abuse and creates barriers to help-seeking. (Services commonly report that one of the strongest barriers to men seeking help is the fear that they will be unfairly suspected of being perpetrators themselves.)

Wherever academic research has been conducted into reciprocal and/or self-defence claims for domestic abusers, it has been found that similar proportions of female and male perpetrators have initiated violence without any claims to provocation, self-defence or reciprocity. (Example: Mackay J. et al (2018) 'Risk factors for female perpetrators of intimate partner violence within criminal justice settings: A systematic review.' Retrieved from <https://eprints.worc.ac.uk/6741/1/2018%20Mackay%20et%20al%20accepted%20AVB.pdf> )

While this is a complex and sensitive area of ongoing academic controversy, there can be little doubt that the presentation of the above claim as a statistical 'fact,' in a resource for use by teachers in schools, is grossly inappropriate and in flagrant violation of the Code of Practice's insistence on impartiality and objectivity.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Statistical data on the prevalence and nature of intimate violence and abuse against men and boys is a field of considerable controversy, complexity and political sensitivity both in academia and in applied frontline policy.

However, a consensus on best evidence is published within the national strategy on Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls and, within that, the Home Office position paper on Supporting Male Victims (March 2022). These documents lean heavily on ONS statistics and were developed by the Home Office in collaboration with experts and professionals from across the abuse prevention and survivor support sectors, including the women's sector.

The Supporting Male Victims document explicitly recommends that its contents should be used by statutory bodies and charity sector practitioners as an information resource and to guide best practice. Many of the claims - statistical or otherwise – contained in the London Mayor’s Teachers Toolkit directly contradict both the detail and the spirit of the Tackling VAWG strategy.

The national Tackling VAWG Strategy explicitly calls on public sector bodies to understand the impact of harmful stereotyping, combined with myths and misconceptions about male victims that can act as barriers for men to engage.

In presenting inaccurate, specious and misleading statistics and statistical claims, it seems probable that the Teachers Toolkit risks directly **contributing** to myths and misconceptions about male victims, rather than challenging those, and therefore serving as a barrier to engagement for boys who are affected. There is a genuine possibility this document could actively cause harm to vulnerable children, especially boys who are themselves victims in abusive situations.

As far as can be ascertained from the credits, the Toolkit document was written and prepared without any engagement with charities or experts specialising in the needs of male victims of intimate crimes. Even a minimum level of engagement may have prevented the mistakes and problems within. The Toolkit would appear to seriously transgress the UKSA Code of Practice with regard to impartiality, honesty and accuracy.

I ask you to consider recommending the immediate withdrawal of the Toolkit and a review of both the detailed content of the document and the process which led to its publication in this form.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours faithfully

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Chair, Men and Boys’ Coalition (Charity No. 1183104)

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(submitted by email)