

Supplementary Submission To the NI Assembly Committee for Justice On the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill In Support of Oral Evidence

October 2026



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Supplementary Submission To the NI Assembly Committee for Justice on the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill.

[Men's Alliance \(NI\)](#) provided oral evidence to [the Committee for Justice on Thursday 17th September 2026](#) in support of our [response to the call for views on the Criminal Justice \(Sentencing etc\) Bill](#).

This supplementary submission provides additional supporting information relevant to committee member questions on the following areas:

- Child Maintenance Errors: Links to Economic Abuse and Suicide
- Child Maintenance Errors: Impact on MANi service users
- False Allegations and the Weaponization of Enforcement Systems
- Gendered Vulnerabilities
- Thoughts on Clause 1 (4) (b)
- Enforceable Article 8 Sanctions - Best Practice Models
- Disaggregated Male Victim Data
- Good News / Best Practice Examples
- Gendered Aggravators
- Visibility and Regard for Male Victims

Child Maintenance Errors: Links to Economic Abuse and Suicide

Connie Egan MLA requested specific examples around links between child maintenance payment errors and disproportionately high male suicide rates.

There is a significant and growing body of evidence supporting concerns that systemic and structural problems in the Child Maintenance Service can be a major contributor to elevated distress and suicide rates among paying parents (who are 90–95% male).¹

This issue has drawn comparisons with the Post Office Horizon IT scandal. The Commons Work and Pensions Committee is currently undertaking an inquiry into concerns over how CMS calculates payments, and enforces decisions.²

Errors, overcharging, and legacy issues: Parliamentary Committee and National Audit Office Reports have long flagged problems with calculations, erroneous arrears, IT systems, data quality and aggressive enforcement. Coroners have documented cases of continued demands after a paying parent's death.³ A recent analysis identified 24,400 cases of overcharging totaling £4.3 million.⁴

Impact on parents: Paying parents report severe hardship, mental distress, housing loss, and employment effects. Receiving parents also report issues. Parliamentary debates and written evidence have included constituent accounts of suicidal ideation tied to disputes, incorrect arrears, and enforcement.

Elevated mortality data: Multiple reported cases involve fathers who died by suicide amid CMS disputes over erroneous arrears. Freedom of Information and DWP/ONS data show paying parents have higher overall death rates than age-matched general population peers (up to 3 times higher in some younger adult age bands).⁵

Northern Ireland Context: In Northern Ireland the system is managed by the Department for Communities (DfC). Research indicates that paying parents in NI face the exact same structural, financial, and psychological issues that have triggered widespread criticism and concern across England, Scotland, and Wales.⁶

Year-on-year caseload data from the Independent Case Examiner (ICE) shows a steady stream of complaints originating from the Department for Communities (DfC) regarding administrative failures, excessive calculation delays, and poor customer service.⁷

¹ See: BBC Panorama Investigation (2026): [Parents pushed to breaking point by Child Maintenance Service](#); and Times Investigation (2026) [Parents 'driven to suicide' by orders to pay child maintenance](#).

² [Work and Pensions Committee Child Maintenance Service Inquiry](#)

³ See: Hammond (2025) [Failure Analysis & Timeline \(1991–2025\)](#) and NAO (2022) [Child Maintenance](#)

⁴ Daily Mail Investigation (2026): [Fathers driven to suicide by chaotic dysfunction in the CMS](#)

⁵ Disability News Service: Shocking' figures show parents linked to DWP service death rates.

⁶ DWP (2026) [Research and analysis: Child maintenance calculation research](#)

⁷ Independent Case Examiner (2025) [DFC complaints to ICE 2024 to 2025](#).

Evidence gathered by the NI Assembly's Communities Committee notes that the rigid system is completely inflexible to changing modern family dynamics, rising costs of living, or a paying parent's actual disposable income. This frequently drives paying parents into deep debt, even when they are fully willing to support their children.⁸

Evidence has also flagged severe concerns about overly aggressive administrative enforcement that exposes NI paying parents to unregulated bank freezes and salary deductions based on potentially flawed debt figures.⁹

Domestic Abuse Context: Research and parliamentary reports have established a clear link between Child Maintenance Service systems and domestic abuse, specifically coercive control and post-separation economic abuse.

Because statutory child maintenance interfaces directly with a separated couple's finances and parenting arrangements, the system itself can easily be weaponised. This dynamic cuts both ways, depending on who is perpetrating the abuse.¹⁰

Researchers and family law advocates have highlighted a critical problem involving false allegations and aggressive enforcement of CMS payments as follows:

- **System Manipulation as Coercive Control:** Hostile ex-partners can deliberately provide false information, such as fabricating paying parent's income level, concealing shared-care agreements, or lying about missed payments.
- **Weaponisation of Automated State Enforcement:** Because the CMS operates mechanically under rigid targets, it reacts to these false reports by deploying aggressive collection powers. Fully compliant paying parents can suddenly find their bank accounts frozen or wages arrested.
- **Resulting Harm:** Fully compliant or lower-income paying parents have found their wages arrested or their bank accounts frozen without notice. Being driven into unmanageable debt by an automated state system, manipulated by an ex-partner, amounts to severe, state-facilitated financial abuse.

The Home Office has recognised misuse of child maintenance as a form of violence against women and girls (VAWG), although they have failed to take account of scenarios where the paying parent is the victim of abuse. Within the wider family, equality and human rights law landscape, driving an innocent ex-partner into unmanageable debt or legal jeopardy through state machinery is recognized as a profound form of financial abuse and coercive control.¹¹

⁸ Committee for Communities (2024): [Report on the Child Support Enforcement Bill](#)

⁹ [Minutes of Evidence - Committee for Communities, meeting on Thursday, 6 June 2024](#)

¹⁰ [Domestic Abuse Commissioner Response to Child Maintenance: Accelerating Enforcement](#).

¹¹ For example see: Work and Pensions Committee (2023): [Inquiry report - Children in poverty: Child Maintenance Service](#); House of Lords. (2025). Reforming the Child Maintenance Service; and Islam, M. S. (2023). Written evidence submitted to the Work and Pensions Committee (CMS0036).

Child Maintenance Errors: Impact on MANi Service Users

The Committee requested further information on the impact of child maintenance errors on the men who interact with Men's Alliance.

This answer should be considered in conjunction with the previous answer. (P4)

Men's Alliance NI supports male victims of domestic abuse, including men dealing with financial pressure, separation and difficulties maintaining a relationship with their children. Child maintenance concerns must be considered within that wider context. We all support the principle that parents should contribute to the financial support of their children. An accurate and fair child maintenance system helps families meet children's needs.

When assessments, payment records or enforcement decisions are wrong, the consequences can affect both the paying parent and the children the system exists to support. Many of the issues were reported in the Documentary "Child Maintenance: Parents under Pressure" a BBC Panorama investigation broadcast in August 2026.¹²

Financial impact: A man leaving an abusive relationship may face the costs of finding accommodation, replacing belongings and obtaining legal advice. He may also need to establish a suitable home where his children can stay. An incorrect maintenance assessment can reduce the money available for rent, heating, food and travel. Where payments already made are disputed or missing from records, a man may face demands for money he believes he has already paid. Errors relating to income, care arrangements or payment history need clear explanations and prompt investigation. A person should be able to understand how an assessment was reached, what evidence supports it and how to challenge an inaccuracy.

Impact on children and family relationships: Financial pressure on a paying parent can also affect children. A father may struggle to afford travel for contact, suitable accommodation or the everyday costs of caring for his children during visits. This matters when assessing the wider impact of a disputed decision. Children need financial support, but they also benefit from stability and safe relationships with both parents.

Where child contact and maintenance disputes occur together, agencies should examine the facts of each issue. They should also recognise that both may form part of a wider pattern of conflict or abuse towards the paying parent.

¹² BBC (2026): [Child Maintenance: Parents under Pressure](#)

Emotional impact: For a man recovering from domestic abuse, receiving demands they believe are wrong can add to feelings of fear, powerlessness and uncertainty. Repeatedly explaining the same problem, without a clear answer or resolution date, can prolong that distress. When staff that he is having to deal with are hostile and rude on the phone this furthers his abuse, with a potentially negative impact on his mental health. When he is faced with a payment of an additional 20% because he has allegedly not been paying, based solely on the paying parents false claim without evidence, this pushes him further into despair.

Administrative error and deliberate misuse: An administrative mistake and the deliberate submission of false information require different responses. An error requires correction, an explanation and consideration of the harm caused. Where there is credible evidence that someone knowingly supplied false information to cause financial harm, agencies should examine whether this forms part of economic abuse or continuing control after separation. Neither parent's account should automatically take priority because of their sex or their position as the paying or receiving parent, with decisions solely following the evidence.

NI men accounts of Issues with CMS:

- Self employed man removed from his home based on false allegations, where his business is based. CMS payments are based on the previous years financial accounts, despite the business having closed due to a Non Molestation Order banning him from his place of work at his home, meaning he has no income.
- Errors in calculations and overcharges being denied, and leaving the man in severe financial stress, taking many months to eventually sort out.
- Increases in payments based solely on claims by the receiving parent, that the paying parent has a higher income to that declared.
- Repeated investigations based on the receiving parents' false claims of non payment/hidden income.
- Increased costs of 20% for Collect and Pay based solely on false claims of non payment.
- Men report concerns about how they are spoken to, with a lack of respect, one man reports being told to call a Legal Representative "Sir" when he asked his name. Men report being talked down to, shouted at, and "treated like dirt"
- Men are asked to prove a negative, that they don't have an income, rather than the other side proving that they do. They have also found that HMRC data is not good enough to prove income if there are unevidenced claims of additional income.

- Men report children can be with them all day (with overnights refused), that's where the cost is but the receiving parent refuses to contribute and Dad is put under emotional pressure to pay further amounts, but Child Maintenance is based on overnights where there is no cost.
- The paying parent has a considerably lower income than the receiving parent, and in 50/50 (all) residence it is calculated on the paying parents income, but the receiving parents income is not considered in calculations.
- Men report the system of Maintenance payments being based on overnights encourages refusal of overnight contact, and prevents them from maintaining a close relationship with their children.

Men's Alliance Recommend:

- Clear calculations and payment records that both parents can understand and check.
- A named contact for complex or disputed cases, reducing the need to repeat information.
- Defined timescales for investigating errors, with progress updates and reasons for delays.
- Prompt review of disputed enforcement where credible evidence suggests the underlying amount is wrong, while protecting children's financial support.
- Staff training on male victims, economic abuse and recognising distress.
- Correction of affected records and consideration of refunds or redress where an error has caused loss.
- Published information on confirmed errors, complaints, resolution times and recurring causes.

Our concern is that errors should not leave a parent struggling for months to restore their financial position. A fair system should secure support for children, correct mistakes quickly and respond appropriately and with respect when its processes are deliberately misused.

False Allegations & the Weaponization of Enforcement Systems

The Committee requested further information on the number of false allegations made against men and the impact this and contact with police and social services can have, drawing from the Men's Alliance survey.

Men's Alliance NI is concerned about the prevalence of accounts from men who describe false allegations being used to continue abuse after separation, with a very large majority of men we interact with having this experience.

100% of the men interviewed in the Victims Commissioner's Male Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence study reported experiencing false allegations. These accounts involve police, social services, courts and disputes over children or finance.¹³

The men we support report services being "weaponised", meaning the deliberate use of official processes to intimidate, punish, isolate or financially harm another person through information the person knows is false. Protective systems need to respond to genuine concerns. They also need safeguards against deliberate misuse, including circumstances where the person accused is themselves a victim of domestic abuse.

What Men's Alliance 2026 Survey showed:

Our extensive false allegations survey received 1,153 responses, including 306 from Northern Ireland. Among the Northern Ireland respondents:

- 85% reported an impact on their mental health.
- 69% reported the allegation was to punish them.
- 63% reported suicidal thoughts.
- 59% reported the allegation was to control or prevent child contact.
- 52% reported self isolation.
- 46% reported being prevented from seeing their children.
- 34% reported being arrested.
- 34% reported that the process allegation to conclusion took over 1 year.
- 31% reported defence costs in excess of £10,000.
- 29% reported being made homeless.
- 20% reported spending at least 1 night in a prison cell.
- 11% reported being refused help by a male support organisation.
- 11% reported losing a job.
- 9% reported losing a business.

¹³ CVC (2024): [Male Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence: The ME-IPV Study](#) p38.

- 17% reported being convicted:
 - 29% of these men reported not having their evidence of innocence considered.
 - 24% of these men took a Plea Bargain as they were told they would not be believed.
 - 16% of these men said they could not disprove allegations for which there was no evidence
- 88% reported no consequences for their accuser.

These findings describe serious harm reported by the men who responded. They show why the handling of allegations, the length of proceedings and access to support require attention.

The survey recruited respondents through our MANi Support Group and social media. It does not measure the prevalence of false allegations across Northern Ireland or independently establish that every allegation was deliberately false. The findings are presented as respondents' experiences, with that distinction made clear.

How official processes can become part of abuse: Our concern is that an abusive person may seek to use an agency's powers to achieve control they can no longer exercise directly. Possible forms of misuse include knowingly making a false report, supplying misleading information, withholding relevant evidence or threatening allegations to influence another person's behaviour, Coercive Control.

An allegation may lead to investigation and decisions affecting housing, employment or child contact before the disputed facts have been resolved. Some protective action may be necessary at that stage. The concern is whether agencies review that action promptly, consider evidence from both parties and respond when information changes. The assessment should consider the history of the relationship, including documented threats and evidence of abuse against the person accused.

Cumulative harm: A man may be responding to several processes at once. He may need to deal with police enquiries, provide information to social services, attend court and challenge a financial decision.

Each agency may see only its own part of the case. The combined impact can include legal costs, missed work, uncertainty about housing and income and prolonged separation from children, leading to a serious impact on his mental and physical health and overall wellbeing. The distinction between an allegation and an established finding matters throughout this process. When agencies share information, they should make its status clear. Repetition across several records should not turn an untested account into an accepted fact.

Impact on children: The 46% of Northern Ireland respondents who reported being prevented from seeing their children highlight a particular concern. Whilst this figure does not establish that every restriction was unjustified, it does show that loss of contact formed a substantial part of the experiences reported.

Children's safety must guide decisions. Where contact restrictions depend on disputed allegations, agencies should review the evidence and the continuing need for those restrictions without avoidable delay, they should also consider the effect on the child of prolonged uncertainty or separation from a safe parent.

Distinguishing a false allegation from an unproven allegation: We recognise that an allegation may remain unproven for several reasons. A decision to take no further action, a discontinued case or an acquittal does not, by itself, establish deliberate fabrication. A fair response needs to distinguish between concerns raised honestly, allegations that cannot be established and allegations supported by evidence of deliberate deception. Where credible evidence of fabrication exists, agencies should examine it. Where the evidence remains uncertain, records and decisions should reflect that uncertainty.

Where we seek change:

- Recognition of the impact of false allegations on mental health and leaving the victim in a vulnerable condition.
- Staff training on male victimisation and the possibility that a person accused of abuse may also, or may be the only one, experiencing it.
- Fair opportunities to provide evidence, including messages, payment records and documented threats.
- Accurate records that distinguish allegations, established findings and unresolved matters.
- Timely reviews of enforcement decisions when new evidence emerges.
- Consideration of the combined impact of several proceedings, including distress, housing insecurity and loss of child contact.
- Clear routes for correcting inaccurate information and notifying agencies.
- Proper examination of credible evidence that someone deliberately fabricated information or misused a process.
- Access to support for people harmed by allegations, regardless of whether a prosecution follows.

Men's Alliance seeks a system that takes disclosures seriously, assesses evidence fairly and protects people from abuse through official processes. The reported harm in our survey deserves a response that combines protection, scrutiny and timely review. A man may lose his home, children, job, income, self respect, reputation or for some their life, and once they receive a letter saying "No Further Action" there is not a reset switch that gives him back his life.

Gendered Vulnerabilities

Brian Kingston MLA and Paul Frew MLA both requested clarification on vulnerabilities encountered by male victims in relation to psychological impairment arising from coercive control.

There is a substantial and growing body of research documenting particular gendered vulnerabilities encountered by male victims of intimate partner violence (IPV) / domestic abuse when the perpetrator is female.¹⁴

Men can be significantly less likely to report or seek help due to fear of not being believed, being falsely accused of perpetration, and concerns about losing access to their children or home. Masculine norms and cultural stigma also lead many men to minimize, deny, or delay disclosure, sometimes for years.

Links between CMS errors, economic abuse and suicide highlights how female perpetrators in particular can weaponize and exploit state enforcement systems including social services, police and courts against the male victim (see page 3). Research highlights this as a particularly effective and gender-specific form of abuse against men, especially when systems are impacted by sex bias and default perceptions of men as presumed perpetrators and / or neglectful parents.¹⁵

Controlling behaviors strongly predict poor health outcomes. Male victims experience high rates of PTSD, depression, anxiety, substance misuse, social isolation, and suicidal ideation.

While female victims often sustain higher rates of severe physical injury overall, many male victims also report substantial injuries.¹⁶ Female perpetrators more frequently use weapons, household objects, boiling water, knives, or attack when the man is vulnerable.¹⁷ Two recently prosecuted cases of domestic homicide in Northern Ireland involved male victims being stabbed to death by their female partner while asleep in their bed.¹⁸

¹⁴ Systematic reviews and qualitative studies identify barriers such as stigma, invisibility of male victims in services (many of which are women-focused), fear of disclosure, and negative responses from professionals (e.g., being turned away, accused, or not taken seriously). Nearly half of male IPV victims in some U.S. data who contacted domestic violence agencies were told support was only for women; over 40% were accused of being abusers. See: Hines (2025): [Male victims of intimate partner violence: Insights from twenty years of research](#).

¹⁵ See: [Bates \(2019\)](#); [Walker et al. \(2019\)](#) and [Hines, Douglas, & Berger \(2015\)](#).

¹⁶ Over 70% in some studies of male IPV victims, with about one-third needing medical attention.

¹⁷ [Breaking the Silence. Male Victims of IPV](#).

¹⁸ The Killings of James Joseph Crossley and Darren McNally.

Society severely condemns actions where an individual perceived to be stronger uses force against someone perceived to have less physical or systemic power. This is because it violates deep cultural expectations around protection and equity and is one reason why violence against women and girls is considered especially taboo.¹⁹

On average, biological differences in upper-body strength create a natural physical power imbalance between heterosexual partners. Females are also often perceived to be disadvantaged by severe systemic inequalities (see image 1).

When women are aggressive, they are more likely to deploy relational or indirect methods over physical ones.²⁰ This can involve psychological and social manipulation to isolate or control their victim. In the case of male victims, women can exploit their perceived vulnerable status to weaponize state interventions against them. This can completely invert the physical and systemic power imbalance (see image 2).



¹⁹ For example: The United Nations defines VAWG as a severe human rights violation and a direct manifestation of unequal power relations between men and women and the NI Executive's own programme for government elevates regard towards victims of violence who are female.

²⁰ **Relational aggression** is a form of non-physical bullying where harm is caused by damaging someone's relationships, social status, or feelings of acceptance.

Clause 1 (4) (b)

The Committee requested further thoughts on Clause 1 (4) (b) which states that the court must have regard to “the character and circumstances of the offender” and how this could impact men who have been subject to abuse by a female partner.

This answer should be considered in conjunction with the previous answer. (P7)

The practical value of Clause 1(4)(b) will depend on courts receiving reliable information and avoiding assumptions that a man involved in a domestic incident must necessarily have been the primary abuser. Clear, gender-inclusive sentencing guidance is needed to avoid stereotypes and ensure consistent application. Where abuse is raised, the court should consider credible evidence, the connection between the abuse and the offence, and any implications for risk and rehabilitation, while continuing to give proper weight to harm, accountability, proportionality and public protection.

A man’s experience of abuse by a current or former partner may be relevant where it has affected his offending, culpability, risk or prospects for rehabilitation. An offence may occur within a wider pattern of coercion, trauma, isolation or financial control. Male victims face significant barriers to disclosure and seeking / receiving help. The absence of an earlier report, conviction or engagement with support services should therefore not, by itself, be taken as evidence that abuse did not occur.

Research finds that male victims who report abuse are frequently disbelieved, blamed for their own victimization, or mistakenly arrested as the primary abuser. This heavily suppresses reporting.²¹

Decades of research also shows that a large proportion of partner abuse is bi-directional. This is largely ignored due to the binary nature of legal and support systems (requiring clear designation of “victim” and “perpetrator”) and rigid unidirectional gendered models that struggle to process non-typical victim scenarios.

A recent global systematic review of studies of physical intimate partner violence found that, on average, 53% of reported violence was bi-directional, although estimates vary by sample and method and do not establish that in all cases both parties exercised equivalent power, control or caused equivalent harm.²²

In such cases, gendered assumptions and a focus on the immediate incident rather than the wider pattern of coercion may increase the risk that a male victim—particularly one who has used force reactively or in self-defence—is labelled as the primary abuser. The court should therefore examine the history, context, intent, impact and pattern of behaviour before reaching conclusions about the offender’s circumstances.

²¹ See: [Hope et al \(2019\)](#); [Bates et al \(2019\)](#); [McCarrick \(2025\)](#) and [Drijber et al \(2013\)](#).

²² Lysova et al.. (2025). [Bidirectional and unidirectional intimate partner violence: A comprehensive review](#). Partner Abuse, 16(1)

Disaggregated Male Victim Data

Emma Sheerin MLA requested additional sex disaggregated data on perpetrators of domestic abuse when the victim is male. Aoife Finnegan MLA requested additional data on sentencing trends in male victim cases.

PSNI Perpetration Trends for Intimate Partner Violence and Domestic Abuse

In cases where the victim was male, 63% of Intimate Partner Violence perpetrators and 45% of Domestic Abuse perpetrators are female.

Table 1: Breakdown of Perpetrators of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) compared with Domestic Abuse (DA) 2023/24. Source FOI13404

Male Victims		2834			IPV	DA Total
Male perps	Partner	651	22.97%		37.01%	55%
	Ex Partner	398	14.04%			
Female perps						
	Partner	774	27.31%		62.99%	45%
	Ex Partner	1011	35.67%			
Female victims		7273				
Male perps	Partner	2681	36.86%		90.00%	80%
	Ex Partner	3865	53.14%			
Female perps						
	Partner	412	5.66%		10.00%	20%
	Ex Partner	315	4.33%			
Total Victims		10107				
Male		28.04%				
Female		71.96%				

Sentencing Trends for Male and Female Perpetrators:

Around 28% of DA crimes are committed by females, yet they represent only 9% of convictions, which further reduces to representing 6% of custodial sentences.²³

In 2021 a female was 70% less likely to face a custodial sentence than a male, this has decreased to 40% in 2025.²⁴

The Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (NI) 2021 came into effect in February 2022. This created a new domestic abuse offence and a set of legislative motivators for other offences. Prior to that, domestic abuse related cases were recorded as such by the Public Prosecution Service, based on an assessment of information related to that case. Information on the number of persons convicted of, or imprisoned for, domestic abuse related or motivated offences, has been provided in the following table.

Table 2: Convictions at courts and custodial disposals in domestic abuse related cases by gender of defendant, 2021 to 2025²⁵

	Convicted				Imprisoned		
Year	Male	Female	Total		Male	Female	Total
2021	1,267	154	1,421		325	12	337
2022	1,339	126	1,465		435	11	446
2023	1,653	144	1,797		565	15	580
2024	1,401	155	1,556		451	20	471
2025	1,539	158	1,697		586	36	622

²³ Men's Alliance (2025): [The Criminal Justice \(Sentencing etc\) Bill: Response to Call for Evidence](#)

²⁴ [Question by Julie Middleton MLA](#) - To ask the Minister of Justice to detail the number of individuals (i) convicted of; and (ii) imprisoned for, domestic abuse related crimes, broken down by (a) gender; and (b) age, over the last five years.

²⁵ Figures are based on initial disposals at courts. Appeals are not included. Figures relate to cases where there was a conviction in a domestic abuse related case under the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021 or, for offences preceding the introduction of that legislation, where there was a conviction for an offence assessed as motivated by domestic abuse by the Public Prosecution Service. Figures for males include a small number of defendants where gender was recorded as not known or other than male or female.

Good News Stories / Best Practice Examples

Ciara Ferguson MLA requested [examples of good news stories / best practice](#).

We would take this opportunity to commend the Department of Justice's partnership with Nexus and the inclusive, non discriminatory service provision approach promoted by the operational delivery of the 24 hour Domestic and Sexual Abuse Helpline.

The number of male callers to this service has increased significantly over Nexus's tenure due to positive action measures they have adopted around inclusive branding, messaging, outreach, and the option to speak to a male operator.

The male victims we support tell us that the DASA helpline has signposted them to male specialist services available in NI (including our own, Men's Advisory Project and Men's Action Network). More broadly, Nexus and the DASA Helpline service have been extremely supportive of initiatives aimed at raising awareness of the gendered challenges encountered by boys and men, for example: by promoting and participating in our annual Women's March for Men.²⁶

We also commend the work undertaken to date by the Office of The NI Victims of Crime Designate (CVC). Since commencing work in 2022, Geraldine and her team have consistently displayed due regard towards all victims of domestic abuse, regardless of their personal characteristics.

CVC have undertaken invaluable work around male victims, including undertaking a rapid research review in 2023,²⁷ leading to the 2024 commissioning of a major QUB study into male IPV victims.²⁸ This was the first research into male victims living in Northern Ireland since the notoriously under-promoted 1998 QUB study commissioned by NISRA and nominally published six years later by the Executive Office's Equality Unit (then OFMDFM).²⁹

CVC's 2025 mapping review drew much needed attention to the stark and well understood gaps in services made available for male victims.³⁰ In 2026 CVC facilitated a cross-departmental meeting with Men's Alliance NI which led to the first ever public statement by an NI Executive Minister acknowledging that the continuing absence of statutory supported refuge provision for male victims places them at increased risk of homelessness, isolation or remaining in abusive situations.

²⁶ See: Men's Alliance NI - [Women's March for Men](#)

²⁷ [Rapid Review - Experiences & Mental Health Impacts of Intimate Partner Violence against Men & Boys](#)

²⁸ [Male Experience of Intimate Partner Violence \(IPV\) Needs Immediate Attention](#)

²⁹ Men's Alliance NI (2026): [The Lasting Impact of the 1998 Abuse of Males Report Being Buried](#).

³⁰ [Mapping Services for Male Adult and Child Victim-Survivors of Domestic and Sexual Abuse in NI](#)

Enforceable Article 8 Sanctions - Best Practice Models

Patsy McGlone MLA requested further information on the recommendation to introduce sanctions for breaches of residence and contact orders, mirroring models in Australia and New Zealand.

When a parent persistently blocks contact, traditional legal systems often reach a stalemate. Fines punish the household finances (directly impacting the child), while imprisonment is rarely used because it separates the child from a primary caregiver and deepens trauma.

In international family law reform discussions, the models used in Australia and New Zealand are cited as progressive frameworks for addressing resident parent refusal to comply with court-ordered contact or residence arrangements.³¹

Rather than relying purely on drastic, disruptive measures (like shifting custody) or rarely enforced criminal jail time, these models utilize a tiered, quasi-criminal enforcement framework and include community service and unpaid work as mid-tier, punitive yet constructive sanctions designed to ensure court orders do not become "worthless" or hollow.

The purpose of introducing **community service orders (CSOs)** or **unpaid work** are to:

- **Create a tangible consequence:** Show the non-compliant parent that defying a court order carries a real, mandatory cost in time and labor.
- **Avoid disrupting the child's daily care:** Keep the parent in the home, maintaining stability for the child while penalizing the adult.
- **Act as a robust deterrent:** Bridge the gap between a gentle "warning" and actual imprisonment, providing a scalable mechanism to uphold the authority of the court.

³¹ See: [The Family Law Act 1975 A Guide to Parenting Order Violations](#); and [New Zealand Family Law Parenting Orders](#).

Sex Based Aggravators

[Paul Frew MLA requested views on the proposal to introduce an offence of femicide.](#)

Men's Alliance are aware of the proposal, as well as the more widely supported misogyny aggravator proposal. We do not support either proposal.

We share Women's Rights Network NI's concerns around the wisdom of legislating on sex based aggravators. These relate to the effectiveness of sex aggravators in law; the impact on policing / justice resources; and potential unintended consequences including: malicious prosecutions; the escalation of DARVO behaviour in domestic violence contexts; and the interpretation of political speech and human rights lobbying as stirring up hostility towards the opposite sex.³²

Home Office guidance has warned that if a sex aggravator is introduced into law there is a possibility of creating a "two-tier hierarchy of prosecutions."³³

Femicide

The proposal does not provide equitable protection for all victims of gendercide.

Femicide is the intentional killing of a female because she is female. DoJ and PSNI have both struggled to isolate, prove, or legally codify rates of femicide. Worldwide there is a small cohort of prosecuted and / or well-evidenced homicide crimes with clear, direct proof of an anti-female motivation. These tend to be explicitly anti-woman ideological attacks where most victims were not known to the killer. No such cases have occurred or been prosecuted in N/UK/ROI Courts.

Discounting prosecutions for genocide, there are an even smaller number of examples of prosecuted crimes with clear anti-male motivation. These include the widely publicised case of serial killer Joanna Dennehy in England (2013).³⁴

Available femicide aggravator case law is largely drawn from Latin America. Prosecutions overwhelmingly involve domestic homicides and almost exclusively rely on circumstantial indicators rather than direct admissions or proof of sex-based hatred. Most of these circumstantial indicators are highly relevant to motivations in cases of male domestic homicide, especially but not exclusively when the killer is female.³⁵

Under Section 15 of the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (NI) 2021, a statutory aggravation can already be added by NI Courts in domestic homicide cases.

³² [Women's Rights Network NI - Written Response September 2026](#)

³³ Home Office (2023): [Response to recommendation 8 of the Law Commission's review of hate crime.](#)

³⁴ See: [Peterborough ditch murders.](#)

³⁵ Documented prior domestic violence, threats, or controlling behaviour; Timing of the killing (especially after separation or rejection); Communications (texts, messages, social media) showing possessiveness, jealousy, or ownership language ("if I can't have you, no one can"); Pattern of the relationship and the manner of the killing; Witness accounts of relationship dynamics; Expert witness testimony.

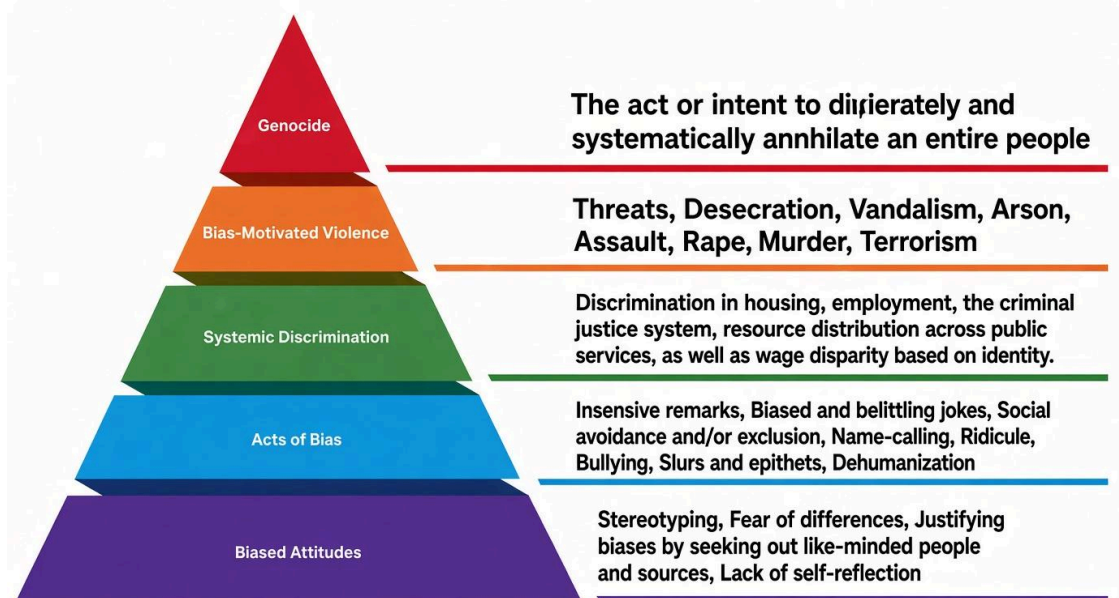
There is significant evidence to show that the intentional killing of a female is severely punished under existing law. Global institutions, including the United Nations and WHO, consider violence against women to be a severe violation of fundamental human rights. Cultural socialisation and societal gender role enforcement³⁶ already support strict taboos around violence against women³⁷. Elevated regard towards female victims is also evidenced by international human rights frameworking, sentencing trends and public policy priorities including, the NI Executive's own Programme for Government.

Androicide

Androicide is the intentional killing of a male because he is male. Extensive sociological and criminological evidence show that the societal enforcement of strict gender roles significantly drives the high rates of male assault and homicide victimization. Globally men comprise roughly 80% of all homicide victims, and the majority of victims of violent crimes.³⁸ This informs the extensive evidence base of mass androicide incidents occurring across history and cultures, for example the 1995 Srebrenica Massacre.³⁹

As these crimes are predominately committed by men they receive fundamentally different legal, psychological, and social responses, to the detriment of the victim (aka victim blaming). These trends are highly significant in the context of the hate continuum theory that informs the NI Executive's EVAWG Framework.

The Hate Crime Continuum Pyramid



³⁶ The "Chivalry" Socialisation: The widespread childhood instruction that "boys don't hit girls".

³⁷ A high proportion of violence against women occurs "behind closed doors".

³⁸ [UNODC Global Study on Homicide 2023](#)

³⁹ [The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia \(ICTY\)](#) ruled that the massacre of over 8,000 Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim) men and boys was an act of genocide.

Misogyny

The Marrinan Review recommended that hate crime law should include all crimes with a gender-based motive. The NI Equality and Human Rights Commissions both support this recommendation. DoJ and the Justice Minister maintain that a dedicated "Phase 2" public consultation is required before any action should be taken by legislators.

The 2022 call for views found that support for a misogyny aggravator is extremely low / narrow. Only 7% supported it, compared to 36% supporting expanding protections to include sex/gender and 29% opposing any recognition of sex/gender for aggravation / sentencing. 68% agreed that if misogyny is included then so must be misandry.⁴⁰

The Scottish Government has not introduced the 'Scottish Model' into Scottish law and instead extended their hate crime law to include all crimes with a gender-based motive.

Supporters of the stand alone misogyny proposals appear to be focused principally on symbolic/societal messaging/signalling more so than practical or ethical sentencing uplifts. This is on the basis that the proposal primarily aims to protect women and girls from crimes that supporters propose should not actually be covered by the aggravator.

Civil servants and legislators have consistently struggled to formulate a legally coherent definition of misogyny that moves beyond abstract concepts.⁴¹ Law Commission officials considering this matter found almost zero case files containing evidentiary proof required to trigger a hate crime prosecution.⁴²

Research shows that both the public and frontline police officers have struggled to understand what "misogyny hate crime" actually means, viewing the term as too academic or elitist to apply to real-world policing scenarios.⁴³

The cohort of hypothetical crime scenarios presented to the Committee could also be encountered by males. For example, the 'road rage' scenario bears notable similarities to a male victim crime recorded by the LA County Commission on Human Relations⁴⁴

As far as we are aware, the most compelling evidential hate motivated example presented to the Committee is the prosecution of Dermott McIlveen for intentional wounding with a knife. This example bears notable similarities to the attempted murders of random male pedestrians in the Joanna Dennehy case which were motivated by prejudice, malice and contempt for men.

Opposition to extending human rights protections to everyone may be perceived by some as being motivated by prejudice, malice, and/or contempt for boys and men.

⁴⁰ DoJ (2023): [Summary of Phase One Consultation and Call for Views Responses and Way Forward](#).

⁴¹ Home Office (2023). [Making misogyny a hate crime: Police, Crime, Sentencing & Courts Bill factsheet](#)

⁴² Law Commission (2021). Hate Crime Laws: Final Report

⁴³ University of Nottingham (2018): [Misogyny Hate Crime Evaluation Report](#)

⁴⁴ Following a traffic accident involving a female & male driver, the female driver punched the victim and exclaimed: "I hate men. If I had a knife, I would kill you.". See: [LA County Human Relations Commission](#)

Broader Societal Adverse Impacts and the ‘Harmful but Legal’ Chilling Effect

Legal experts and free-speech advocates have expressed concerns that introducing broad or vaguely defined gender-hostility laws will suppress legitimate discourse. This has implications for democracy in Northern Ireland, especially in the context of the evolving trend of MLAs being targeted with accusations or inferences of misogyny.

A "harmful but legal chilling effect" occurs when people choose to silence themselves or stop exercising their legal rights (such as free speech) out of fear of negative social, economic, or non-penal consequences, even though their actions are entirely legal and violate no laws. This concept frequently intersects with debates over online safety regulations regarding content that is legal to post but perceived as potentially harmful.

The Free Speech Union (FSU) have raised significant concerns that policing "misogyny", whether via standalone legislation or by adding "sex" to Hate Crime Frameworks will cause distinct chilling effects.⁴⁵ A core argument is that the definitions of misogyny used in legislative discussions (such as the Scottish working group's definition focusing on "male entitlement") are highly ideological. Implications include:

- **Criminalising Basic Language:** Because terms like "abusive" or "misogynistic" can be highly subjective, everyday interactions could become police matters.
- **Vexatious Complaints:** Pointing to the rollout of Scotland's Hate Crime Act—which saw thousands of complaints filed in its first weeks—the FSU maintains that adding broad misogyny or sex-based laws will trigger a flood of vexatious, politically motivated complaints aimed at silencing opponents.
- **Self-Censorship:** If a complaint does not result in a prosecution, the mere threat of being investigated by Police causes an immediate chilling effect, forcing writers, politicians, and everyday citizens to self-censor out of fear.
- **Impact on Digital Spaces:** Sweeping regulatory classifications of "lawful but misogynistic" content push social media platforms to pre-emptively remove completely legal, contentious political commentary to avoid liability, creating an environment hostile to open adult debate.
- **Human Rights Advocacy Censorship:** Human rights advocates who critique modern gender policies, challenge family court biases, or argue that men face distinct inequalities (such as higher rates of suicide and workplace deaths) could find their arguments legally branded as "upholding male supremacy."
- **Asymmetrical Legal Protections:** When laws protect only "women and girls" from gender-based hatred or harassment it effectively tells men that their concerns are less valid, suppressing open debate on male vulnerability whilst also potentially criminalising ordinary male socialization.

⁴⁵ Free Speech Union (2022): [Free Speech and Hate Crime Legislation in Northern Ireland](#)

- **The Policing of Teenage Boys:** The FSU has criticized expanding hate speech frameworks or anti-extremism protocols (like the UK-wide Prevent program) to monitor "misogynistic" attitudes among young men. In response to policies aimed at curbing the influence of "manosphere" figures on boys, they warn that using "vague and capacious" legal terms like misogyny risks misclassifying immature or contrarian schoolboy behavior as extremist radicalisation.

Pushing schools and police to monitor boys creates a chilling environment where young men will self-censor entirely, out of fear that standard teenage peer dynamics could be treated as a police matter or a national security threat.

Sex Specific Public Policy Constructs

In legislative and public policy contexts, sex specific constructs can obfuscate or undermine victim visibility. For example: widely promoted claims about femicide rates in NI have been shown to have counted in male victim data.⁴⁶ Claims and perceptions around rates of VAWG can also be informed by data analysis counting in male victims.⁴⁷

Sex specific constructs can also be exploited by economically and politically motivated special interest lobbyists to steer public policy towards the unwitting withholding of state regard, resources, support and justice mechanisms from significant populations of minority victims protected under human rights law.

Hate crime law exists to protect structurally marginalized groups. The introduction of a standalone misogyny aggravator might win MLAs some votes and/or plaudits in the short term but it will not provide victims of crime with equal protection or regard.

⁴⁶ See: [Claim that 'NI is most dangerous place for women in Europe' is false says chief constable.](#)

⁴⁷ See: [Why does the CPS report on violence against women include men in the stats?](#)

Visibility and Regard for Male Victims

Doug Beatie MLA asked if there is any evidence supporting the concern that the NI Executive's priority focus on ending violence against women and girls may unintentionally force male victims into the shadows.

Men's Alliance NI fully supports the NI Executive's aim to create a changed society where women and girls are free from all forms of violence. Women and girls are especially 'at risk' from domestic and sexual abuse and male victims encounter gendered barriers when seeking protection, support and justice. It is possible for both of these things to be true, just as it is equally possible to address both problems.

The issue of visibility and regard for male victims significantly pre-dates the introduction of the EVWAG Framework. By way of example, we recently met with the Deputy First Minister to discuss the legacy impact of actions taken by TEO's Equality Unit that effectively 'buried' crucial research findings into male victims in 1998.⁴⁸

More recently, the public consultation version of the 'gender neutral' DASA strategy contained an extraordinarily biased and insensitive analysis of domestic homicide trends.⁴⁹ Had the error been reversed it would likely have elicited widespread condemnation and concern from civil society.

Male victims often describe the system as biased and prejudiced against them. Empirical evidence supporting this perception is widely available. Despite this, limited progress has been made by Executive Departments to address this issue since the creation of the NI Assembly and the introduction of Public Authority Equality Duties.

The equality impact assessment for the current nominally neutral DASA Strategy failed to identify or acknowledge, let alone seek to mitigate against adverse impacts for male victims arising from explicit and widely acknowledged NI Executive policy on gender budgeting, objective needs assessments and service procurement.

Victim Support NI have called on the Executive to provide adequate services, including floating support, to meet the needs of male victims.⁵⁰ Without this action DoJ/H cannot realistically achieve key outcomes outlined in their DASA Strategy.

The Victims Commissioner designate has highlighted long understood gaps in specialist support services accessible to men. She has reminded Departments that they have statutory duties towards all victim-survivors and acknowledged that this is a pressing public health issue with significant implications for wider society.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Men's Alliance NI (2026): [The Lasting Impact of the 1998 Abuse of Males Report Being Buried](#).

⁴⁹ "Tragically there were 9 murders with a domestic abuse motivation. 4 of the victims were female" (p15).

⁵⁰ Victim Support NI (2024): [Response to Consultation: Draft Victims and Witnesses of Crime Strategy](#).

⁵¹ Mapping Services for Male Adult and Child Victim-Survivors of Domestic and Sexual Abuse in NI

The Department of Health has acknowledged that the continuing absence of statutory supported specialist refuge provision for male victims places them at increased risk of homelessness, isolation or remaining in abusive situations.

Male victims are clearly not afforded access to the same standard or range of statutory funded services and support, when compared to female victims. These restrictions occur solely on the basis of the protected characteristic of sex and are prima facie evidence of direct sex discrimination arising from the actions and inactions of NI Executive Departments.

This discrimination has intersectional impacts for male and female children, disabled men, elderly men, gay men and bisexual men, transgender men, men with dependants and men from ethnic minority backgrounds, including men at risk of forced marriage.

The Human Rights Act 1998; The Northern Ireland Act 1998; The Victim Charter Justice Act (NI) 2015; The Sex Discrimination Order (NI) 1976; The European Convention of Human Rights; UN Conventions on the Rights of the Child, and Rights of People with Disabilities; The Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children Against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse and The EU Victims Directive all contain articles asserting protection from discrimination on the basis of sex.

TEO asserts that the EVAWG Framework is best characterised as ‘a targeted positive action measure’ to protect a Section 75 group especially ‘at risk’ from domestic, sexual and other forms of ‘*gendered violence*’. For positive actions to be lawful, they must be proportionate and balanced against adverse impacts for other protected groups.

The Equality Commission NI has recommended that Departments take gender specific actions to address violence experienced by both women and men.

Executive Ministers and Department Officials appear to understand that, by progressing one single sex positive action plan only, they are sending out a message that tackling violence, abuse and harm experienced by boys and men is less important to them.⁵²

We believe that the practical and pragmatic solution to moving beyond decades of ‘lip service’ is for TEO to work in partnership with other Departments to agree a positive action plan to address structural and attitudinal barriers that male victims of intimate violence encounter when seeking protection, and justice from the NI Executive.

⁵² TEO has acknowledged that boys and men: ‘*may feel that their trauma is being seen as less important.*’ The Justice Minister has acknowledged that: “*the adoption of a gender-sensitive strategy sends out a message that tackling abuse against men is less important.*”

GB / UK Wide Context

It is also relevant to highlight the fact that in other UK regions actions to address intimate violence against men and boys⁵³ are progressed through cross-governmental policy strategies to end Violence Against Women and Girls.

By way of example, in England and Wales the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) classifies rape as a "Violence Against Women and Girls" (VAWG) crime because the VAWG offences are committed primarily, but not exclusively, by men against female victims.⁵⁴ This means that the guilty verdicts in all 136 counts of rape by the UK's most prolific rapist are recorded as VAWG. All 48 victims were male, Police estimate his actual victim count to be at least 206 men.⁵⁵

Human rights advocates, including the Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales, have drawn attention to the fact that the practice of categorising abuse experienced by men and boys as violence against women and girls is "harmful, offensive, severely minimizes the visibility of male victims-survivors, and leads to inadequate protection".⁵⁶

This relatively unique approach to public policy, justice and service delivery can be seen to also adversely impact the human rights of male victims living in Northern Ireland when UK wide approaches are adopted or promoted.

For example, in line with the National Police Chiefs Council guidelines the PSN defines violence against women and girls as: "*acts of violence or abuse that disproportionately affect women and girls*".⁵⁷ Disproportionately but not exclusively.

The Online Safety Act 2023 is a UK-wide parliament statute. Following obligations under the Act, Ofcom have published industry guidance to tackle online abuse and violence against women and girls. This statutory guidance has been criticized on the basis that it does not acknowledge or seek to extend protections to male victims of crimes categorized as "Violence Against Women and Girls"

Ofcom's own research shows that the proportion of males and females encountering online harms are very similar.⁵⁸ Both sexes are also disproportionately impacted by particular forms of abuse, for example: 91% of sextortion victims are estimated to be male,⁵⁹ while the majority of victims of intimate image abuse, deepfake pornography and cyberflashing are female.

⁵³ These include (but are not restricted to) acts of sexual abuse and sexual violence; domestic and relationship violence; stalking; sexual exploitation; forced marriage and so-called honour-based violence.

⁵⁴ [CPS Violence against Women and Girls Guidance](#)

⁵⁵ BBC - [Reynhard Sinaga: Serial rapist 'abused 206 men.'](#)

⁵⁶ Victims Commissioner (2024): [Male Survivors are an Afterthought](#)

⁵⁷ [PSNI FOI/14765: Category: Incident and Crime Statistics - Violence against Women and Girls](#)

⁵⁸ Ofcom's Online Nation and State of the Nation tracking data showed that both men (64%) and boys (67%) are statistically just as likely, or slightly more likely, than women (60%) and girls (66%) to report experiencing or witnessing a potentially harmful online behaviour or content.

⁵⁹ [Source: Internet Watch Foundation \(2024\).](#)

APPENDIX 1 - THE DUTY TO COMBAT SEX DISCRIMINATION

We urge all Northern Ireland Executive Ministers, Members of the Legislative Assembly and Department Officials to be mindful of their statutory duty to combat sex discrimination and promote equality of opportunity between women and men.

Domestic and sexual abuse are grave violations of human rights, against which victims have a legal right to protection and redress through the courts. They can involve the breach of a number of rights protected by [The Human Rights Act 1998](#), most particularly:

- [Article 2](#) - the right to life;
- [Article 3](#) - the right not to be tortured / subject to degrading treatment;
- [Article 8](#) - the right to respect for private and family life;
- [Article 14](#) - the right to be free from discrimination.

[Sex discrimination](#) in service provision and public policy has been illegal in Northern Ireland since the 1970's.

[Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998](#) requires public authorities to show due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between nine equality grounds, including between men and women.

Public authorities must also address the intersecting needs and experiences of people with more than one protected characteristic. For example, the provision of accessible and equitable support services for older men with disabilities experiencing domestic abuse, or young men from an ethnic minority background at risk of forced marriage.

[The NI Victims Charter 2015](#) establishes that women and men are entitled to be recognised and treated in a respectful, dignified, courteous, sensitive, tailored, professional and non-discriminatory manner by the service providers.

[The European Convention of Human Rights](#); [UN Conventions on both the Rights of the Child](#), and [Rights of People with Disabilities](#); [The Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children Against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse](#) and [The EU Victims Directive](#) all contain articles asserting protection from discrimination due to personal characteristics. Even [The Istanbul Convention](#) encourages State Parties to apply the Convention to all victims of domestic violence, including male children.