

THE LASTING IMPACT OF THE 1998 “ABUSE OF ADULT MALES” REPORT BEING “BURIED” IN NORTHERN IRELAND

“The decision to shelve the 1998 “Abuse of Adult Males” report severely set back Northern Ireland’s response to male domestic abuse victims.”



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MEN'S ALLIANCE
NORTHERN IRELAND
Against Domestic Abuse

Executive Summary:

In 1998, the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) in Northern Ireland commissioned a groundbreaking study on the abuse of adult males in intimate partner relationships. The research exposed a hidden population of men suffering physical, sexual and emotional abuse, primarily from female partners. It also highlighted serious institutional barriers, including police and social service bias, stigma, and the absence of support structures. The report made clear recommendations to improve recognition, support, and policy response for male victims.

Despite its importance, the report was seemingly shelved. Its findings were neither promoted nor implemented. This decision had long-term consequences. For more than two decades, male victims remained unsupported, under-recognised and often actively disbelieved. Services were not developed. Awareness was not raised. Training was not delivered. The 2024 “Male Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence” (ME-IPV) report confirms that many of the same problems identified in 1998 still exist today.

Public awareness of male victimisation did not improve after 1998. No campaigns were launched to challenge stereotypes or encourage men to come forward. As a result, stigma persisted. Many men still feel unable to speak out for fear of not being believed or being seen as weak. The 2024 report shows that stigma remains one of the biggest barriers to disclosure, with male victims often suffering in silence.

Police and legal systems also failed to adapt. The 1998 report warned against assuming men were the aggressors. It called for changes to protocols and judicial procedures. These recommendations were ignored. Men continued to face suspicion when reporting abuse. Many were arrested or treated as perpetrators. By

2024, male victims still describe unequal treatment in court and policing, including the use of false allegations against them.

Support services were not developed as advised. The 1998 report recommended a helpline, a drop-in centre, and safe housing for male victims. None of these were provided. Northern Ireland still has no domestic abuse refuge for men. A few underfunded charities try to fill the gap, but the absence of a coordinated response leaves most men without help.

Professional training was another missed opportunity. The report called for education across police, social work and healthcare to raise awareness and improve responses. These programs never materialised. Male victims continued to meet frontline workers who were untrained or dismissive. The 2024 study confirms that most professionals are still not equipped to deal with male disclosures fairly or effectively.

No further research was commissioned until 2024. The lack of data helped keep the issue off the agenda. Without evidence of prevalence and need, there was little policy pressure to act. The 2024 ME-IPV study filled that gap, but it came over 20 years too late. The delay contributed to underinvestment, a lack of planning, and continued poor outcomes.

Policymakers must now act. Northern Ireland needs a national awareness campaign, gender-inclusive training, a refuge for male victims, and dedicated support services. The legal system must remove gender bias from its procedures. Most of all, government must lead. The failure to act on the 1998 report caused real harm. That mistake must not be repeated.

Are you going to be on the right side of history?

(1) Background: The 1998 Report and Its Suppression

As reported in the Belfast Telegraph in August 2024, in 1998, the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) in Northern Ireland commissioned **“Abuse of Adult Males in Intimate Partner Relationships”** – a groundbreaking study by Mike Brogden and Saranjit Nijhar. This research, conducted on behalf of the NI Domestic Violence Forum, was the first to provide insight into men’s experiences as victims of domestic abuse in Northern Ireland. It identified a *“hidden population”* of male victims suffering physical, sexual, and emotional abuse from female partners, and documented institutional biases that left these men without support. Crucially, the report set out comprehensive recommendations to improve recognition and services for male victims. However, despite being **funded by OFMDFM**, the report was effectively **buried** – its findings and recommendations were not implemented or promoted by the very office that commissioned it. This lack of action meant that for years the report remained obscure, and its policy recommendations went unheeded. The failure to act on the 1998 findings had profound consequences for male victims of intimate partner violence (IPV) in Northern Ireland, delaying the development of support systems and leaving critical gaps unaddressed for over two decades.

(2) Consequences of Ignoring the 1998 Report for Male Victims

“Burying” the 1998 report **delayed and blocked key developments** that could have greatly benefited male victims of domestic abuse. In particular, it led to:

- 🔴 **Stalled Development of Services and Support Infrastructure:** The report had called for dedicated support services (e.g. helplines, counseling programs, refuges) for men, but these were not established

by authorities at the time. As a result, male victims remained with **virtually no tailored services or safe accommodations** for many years. Even by 2024, Northern Ireland still has **no domestic abuse refuge for men**, and the few support charities that exist for male victims are small and chronically underfunded. The lack of formal support infrastructure left countless men with nowhere to turn, often forcing them to rely on informal help or endure abuse in silence.

🌐 **Lack of Recognition and Public Awareness:** Because the 1998 report’s evidence was not publicised or integrated into policy, there was **little official recognition** that men can be victims of domestic violence. No public awareness campaigns were launched to challenge stereotypes or encourage male victims to come forward. Consequently, a strong stigma persisted around male victimhood. Men continued to fear being seen as “weak” or not believed, reinforcing low disclosure rates. Indeed, by 2024 societal attitudes still “fall back on harmful stereotypes” with a widespread **lack of awareness** about male IPV, creating an environment where victims feel humiliated or ignored. This silence and invisibility in public discourse meant missed opportunities to normalise help-seeking for men.

🌐 **Institutional Bias and Inadequate Professional Response:** Without the 1998 recommendations being adopted, **training and policy changes in frontline agencies did not occur**, leading to continued institutional biases against male victims. The 1998 study had found that virtually “*no one agency*” readily accepted men as victims – social workers, police, and others often assumed the man was the aggressor. This remained largely unchanged in subsequent years. Police and social services were not systematically trained to recognise male victims, so men reporting

abuse often encountered scepticism or were even treated as suspects. The **male-as-perpetrator default** persisted in practice, undermining male victims' access to justice and protection. By 2024, many men still report biased treatment by the criminal justice system and family courts, indicating that the **gender bias** the report warned of was allowed to continue unchecked.

In sum, the suppression of the 1998 report meant **two decades of policy inertia** on male victims of domestic abuse. The development of specialised services, support infrastructure, and societal recognition for this population was effectively frozen. The needs identified in 1998 went unaddressed, with **male victims left without a voice or adequate support** in Northern Ireland's domestic violence strategy for many years. The sections below detail specific missed opportunities from 1998 to 2024 across key areas and how these lost opportunities contributed to problems still seen today (as evidenced by the 2024 "ME-IPV" report).

(3) Missed Opportunities from 1998–2024 by Key Area

a. Public Awareness and Recognition

1998 Recommendation: The 1998 report urged a concerted effort to raise public awareness that men can be victims of domestic abuse. It recommended **public information campaigns** to enable male victims to disclose their abuse "*without fear of humiliating consequences.*" This included distributing informational leaflets at places like GP clinics to reach potential male victims. The report also emphasised the need to **challenge societal and patriarchal stereotypes** by ensuring all domestic violence education and prevention campaigns include content on female-perpetrated abuse of men. In short, the authors called for "*consciousness-raising*" so that both the public and practitioners would recognise the reality of male victimisation.

Missed Opportunity: These awareness efforts did not materialise. OFMDFM did not launch any significant public campaign acknowledging male victims in the aftermath of 1998. Consequently, a major opportunity to **normalise the narrative** that “abuse isn’t gender based, it’s victim based” was missed. Through the 2000s and 2010s, domestic abuse remained publicly framed almost exclusively as a women’s issue, with men’s experiences largely hidden. This failure to counter stereotypes meant that **stigma and disbelief** around male victims persisted unabated. Men continued to worry that seeking help would lead to ridicule or dismissal of their masculinity – the very attitudes the 1998 report wanted to combat.

By 2024: The effects of this missed opportunity are evident. The 2024 *Male Experiences of IPV (ME-IPV)* study notes that “*society falls back on harmful stereotypes*” and that enduring stigma still discourages men from seeking help^[5]. Although there have been some recent improvements (e.g. slight declines in stigmatic beliefs since 2015), **awareness remains low** and male victims remain a “hidden population.” The 2024 report explicitly highlights that stigma is an “*enduring barrier to support*”. Had Northern Ireland implemented a robust awareness campaign two decades earlier, much of this stigma might have been reduced. Male victimisation could have been an accepted part of the public conversation on domestic violence, potentially leading to higher reporting and earlier intervention for many men. Instead, the lack of early public recognition left a legacy of silence that is only now starting to be broken.

b. Law Reform and Policy Frameworks

1998 Recommendation: While the 1998 report did not propose specific legislation, it clearly recommended changes in policy and protocols so that the **justice system treats male victims fairly**. In particular, it stated that police and other investigatory agencies should be mandated to “*accept that the male is not necessarily the offender but sometimes the victim.*” Procedures needed to be restructured to

remove any presumption of male guilt in domestic incidents. This implied reforms in how police respond to domestic calls (to assess each situation without gender bias) and how courts handle protective orders or false allegations. The report's findings showed men often felt "*legal procedures were...biased against them*" so the recommendation was essentially to reform policy to ensure **gender equality in protection and credibility** within domestic violence and family law proceedings.

Missed Opportunity: No immediate policy or legal reforms were undertaken to address these biases after 1998. Northern Ireland's domestic violence strategies and criminal justice policies continued for many years with a **gendered focus that prioritised female victims**. Men's unique legal challenges (such as facing false-allegations, or difficulties obtaining restraining orders or custody of children when they were the victim) were not specifically remedied in law or guidelines. For example, it took until *2021* for Northern Ireland to enact comprehensive domestic abuse legislation (the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (NI) 2021), and even that came after long delays and was driven primarily by parity with the rest of the UK rather than recognition of male victims. In the interim years, **false allegations and gender bias in family courts** remained thorny issues that were not proactively addressed. The government missed the chance to institute **judicial reforms** (e.g. stricter consequences for false claims, training for magistrates on male-victim cases, or ensuring housing and legal aid policies do not assume the man is the perpetrator). Essentially, the legal system's approach to domestic abuse went unreformed in a gender-inclusive way, leaving male victims legally vulnerable and often **de facto excluded from full protection**.

By 2024: The ME-IPV report confirms that many of these issues still exist. Male participants in 2024 described the family court and criminal court systems as *punitive* and biased against them, echoing the same problems noted in 1998. The report calls for **judicial reform to combat gender bias** in the courts and better legal accountability for false accusations. It also emphasises that **institutional abuse** (via police, courts, social services) compounded the trauma for many men, as false

allegations were “weaponised” against them and they often lacked access to support or even belief in legal settings. These ongoing problems could have been mitigated had reforms been instituted earlier. For instance, clear policies that **police should not assume the male is automatically the aggressor** and training on unbiased investigation might have prevented many injustices. Similarly, earlier updates to family law procedures could have ensured that male victims weren’t routinely losing their homes or children due to unchecked false allegations. The fact that **2024 victims still call for basic legal equality** shows that the recommendations from 1998 were not implemented when they should have been, prolonging systemic biases that harmed male victims for decades.

c. Data Collection and Research

1998 Recommendation: Brogden and Nijhar explicitly recommended further research to establish the **extent and context** of male victimisation in NI. Because their study was qualitative and exploratory (52 self-selected men), they urged that quantitative research be undertaken to measure how widespread male abuse is and to profile the victims (age, background, health impacts, etc.). In short, they called for Northern Ireland to invest in ongoing data collection – surveys or studies – to build an evidence base on male intimate partner violence. This would inform policy by moving beyond anecdotes to hard data on prevalence and needs.

Missed Opportunity: This recommendation was **not pursued for decades**. After 1998, there was no government-commissioned research focused on male domestic abuse victims in Northern Ireland for a very long time. No dedicated module in crime surveys, no follow-up prevalence study – effectively a data vacuum. As a result, policymakers lacked local evidence of the scale of the issue, which made it easier to ignore. The absence of NI-specific data on male victims meant that the issue remained “out of sight, out of mind” in official circles. It was a major missed opportunity to build momentum: with solid statistics or studies in the early 2000s, the government could have been prompted to act. Instead, **without data, there**

was no pressure to develop services or allocate funding – a classic case of what isn't measured isn't managed.

By 2024: Tellingly, the *ME-IPV 2024* study was the **first comprehensive exploration** of male victims' health and support needs in NI. The authors note it is *“to date, the first exploration”* of its kind – underscoring the 26-year gap in research. In other words, the call in 1998 for ongoing research went unheeded until the Commissioner for Victims of Crime finally completed this study in 2023/24. The lack of earlier data collection meant that only now are policymakers waking up to the **sociodemographic profile and true scale** of male IPV in NI. This delay unquestionably impeded evidence-based policy development. Issues identified in 2024 – such as the significant mental health toll on male victims and the numbers of men affected – could have been documented much earlier, possibly spurring action. The *2024 report itself is a direct response to the longstanding research gap*, essentially doing what the 1998 report implored: capturing data on prevalence, health impact, and support needs. The fact that it took until 2024 to get this information represents years of lost insight. Earlier research could have informed funding bids, training programs, and awareness efforts well before now.

d. Training of Professionals (Police, Social Services, Health, etc.)

1998 Recommendation: A key theme in 1998 was the need for training and education of professionals to improve institutional responses. The report recommended **training programs for social workers** so they could recognise and appropriately handle cases of male victimisation. It likewise advised that **police training** and procedures be revamped to *“avoid the possibility that male guilt is presumed”* in domestic incidents. It even suggested developing **“training packs”** and materials to sensitise agency personnel across the board to evidence of female-on-male abuse, GPs and medical staff were to be supplied with referral information so they could direct male victims to help. In essence, the report called for a widespread professional re-education: from frontline police officers to social

services and healthcare providers, all needed to be made aware that male victims exist and should be taken seriously.

Missed Opportunity: These training initiatives were never systematically rolled out by OFMDFM or other bodies in the early years. While some **incremental changes** occurred (for example, general domestic violence training for police improved focus on female victims, which inadvertently entrenched the view of males as perpetrators), there was no equivalent push to train staff on male victims. Social workers and healthcare providers continued to operate under a framework that assumed the woman is the likely victim. The missed opportunity here was huge – early training could have gradually shifted organisational cultures. Instead, male victims often encountered professionals who were **ill-prepared or outright dismissive**. For instance, many men in the 1998 study reported that social workers automatically sided with the female or even divulged the man’s complaints to his partner, worsening his situation. Without mandated training, such harmful practices went uncorrected for years. Police protocols also remained oriented toward arresting male “offenders,” meaning a male victim’s call for help could result in *him* being treated as the suspect. The lack of training perpetuated an **institutional blind spot** – agencies did not know how to identify a male victim or properly support him, compounding these victims’ trauma.

By 2024: The need for professional training is still highlighted as a priority. The ME-IPV participants in 2024 explicitly call for **education and training for police, court staff, and other statutory agencies to eliminate institutional stigma and gender bias**[23]. They also emphasise training social services workers to understand that fathers can be victims and to overcome a culture of stigma. This shows that even today, many professionals lack the knowledge or mindset to assist male victims empathetically. The fact that survivors themselves demand training reforms indicates that previous training deficits identified in 1998 remain unaddressed. Had the government acted on the 1998 recommendations, by now frontline responders would likely have 2 decades of experience handling male victim cases. Instead, **the**

learning curve is only beginning, and male victims in 2024 recount negative experiences with untrained professionals that mirror those from 1998. This continuity of poor institutional response is a direct outcome of the failure to implement early training and sensitisation.

e. Service Provision and Support Infrastructure

1998 Recommendation: The report made strong calls for building a support infrastructure tailored to male victims. It recommended establishing a dedicated **telephone helpline** for male victims, both as a counseling service and a referral gateway. It also proposed setting up a “**drop-in**” **support centre** to address the full range of male victims’ needs – from health advice to legal rights information. Additionally, the authors urged that existing services (like hospitals or clinics treating injuries) be **sensitised** to refer male victims for emotional support, similar to the services available for women. Essentially, the vision was to *complement the female-focused services with equivalent support for men*, including counseling, advocacy, and information provision. These measures would have created an infrastructure where men could seek help safely, get advice, and find shelter if needed.

Missed Opportunity: Virtually none of these service developments were implemented by OFMDFM in the years following the report. **No male-specific helpline** was launched by the NI government in that era (male victims instead had to rely on generic helplines or the UK-wide Respect line much later). **No drop-in center or dedicated refuge** was created for men. In fact, to this day Northern Ireland has *no specialised refuge accommodation for male domestic abuse victims*. Some support infrastructure did eventually emerge, but it was driven largely by the voluntary sector: charities like Men’s Advisory Project, Men’s Action Network, and Men’s Alliance formed to fill the void. However, these organisations have struggled with limited funding and capacity. The government’s failure to seed and fund services in the early 2000s meant that male victims have long had **far fewer**

resources than female victims. For example, whereas Women’s Aid established refuges and support programmes for women across NI, men had no equivalent safe house or comprehensive service network. The missed opportunity here was to institutionalise support for half of domestic violence victims (albeit a minority proportion) – instead, men were left to largely fend for themselves or seek ad-hoc help. This lack of official service commissioning also signaled to local health trusts and councils that male-focused services were not a priority, further stalling any grassroots initiatives.

By 2024: The service gap persists. The 2024 report notes starkly that male victims “*face a lack of dedicated support services compared to those available for women*”, with **no refuge places for men in NI** who need to escape abuse. It lists the few NGOs that try to support men and acknowledges they have suffered from funding shortages, exacerbated by political instability in Stormont. Men in the study expressed frustration that while robust support pathways “**exist for women... it just does not exist for them**”. In other words, male victims see clearly the inequity in support infrastructure. The 2024 findings strongly imply that if the 1998 recommendations had been acted on, by now Northern Ireland **could have had a helpline, a shelter, and organised support programs for men** – resources that might have eased the suffering of many individuals in the interim. Instead, the neglect of those recommendations left a two-tier system where male victims’ needs were sidelined. Only in recent years have there been promises of more funding for male services (e.g. the UK Government noting a planned 60% increase in funding for men’s support, albeit in a strategy that mentioned male victims only in passing). Essentially, the development of a proper support infrastructure for male IPV victims was delayed by over 20 years.

f. Political Accountability and Leadership

1998 Recommendation: While not explicitly stated as a “recommendation” labeled in the report, an implicit expectation was that the government (having

commissioned the study) would take **ownership of the findings** and integrate them into policy. The report's conclusion pressed for a "*commitment to raise consciousness*" in agencies and to consider male victims in all domestic violence programs. This implied that political leaders should champion these changes and hold agencies accountable for implementation. In effect, OFMDFM was expected to show leadership by acknowledging male victims in its strategies, allocating funding, and ensuring the Domestic Violence Forum followed up on the report's recommendations.

Missed Opportunity: The handling of the report represents a failure of political accountability. After funding the research, OFMDFM did not publish or widely promote it (in fact, declassified files suggest there were disputes and attempts to alter the report, indicating discomfort with its content) – it wasn't until 2004 that OFMDFM quietly published the report with no fanfare. There was no Ministerial statement addressing the findings, no task force formed to address male victims, and no inclusion of these issues in the prevailing policy frameworks of the time. Domestic violence policy in NI continued under direct rule and early devolution focusing on women (mirroring the broader "**Violence Against Women and Girls**" paradigm). Male victims were essentially an afterthought; for years, the only mention in national strategy documents was cursory at best (e.g. one line acknowledging men in a UK VAWG strategy, with reference to a separate statement on male victims). Locally, the NI Executive did not establish any robust monitoring or reporting on male victims. The **Domestic Violence Strategic Plans** issued in the 2000s and 2010s lumped male victims into a generic category without specific actions, if they were mentioned at all. In short, the political leaders did not hold anyone accountable for implementing the 1998 recommendations – there was no transparency or follow-up, allowing the report to be effectively swept under the rug.

By 2024: This lack of leadership meant that not until recently has there been official movement. As of 2024, Northern Ireland is only *proposing* a dedicated strategy that includes male victims: a new **Domestic & Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy**

that covers both genders (alongside a separate VAWG action plan for women). That means that well into the 2020s, **Northern Ireland still lacked an implemented policy framework that robustly addresses male victims**. Political inattention also led to funding gaps – e.g., years with no functioning Executive (2017–2020) resulted in male-support NGOs receiving no budget increases. The 2024 report serves as a wake-up call, but it underscores how much was left undone. It explicitly frames itself as an “*evidence-based call to action for change in NI*” – something that ideally should have happened in 1998. The report urges that **policy now take male victims into consideration** and that government support awareness campaigns and appoint liaisons, etc., to correct injustices. The fact that such appeals are necessary in 2024 highlights the vacuum of political accountability before now. Had OFMDFM and successive administrations embraced accountability in 1998, they would have regularly reported on progress for male victims, ensured inclusion in all domestic abuse initiatives, and made it a political priority to **protect all victims regardless of gender**. Instead, the issue languished on the margins, with *no champions in government* until very recently (e.g. the Victims’ Commissioner initiating research). The missed opportunity in leadership thus delayed systemic change by a whole generation.

(4) Key 1998 Recommendations That Were Not Implemented

The following are **key recommendations from the 1998 OFMDFM-funded report** that were *either ignored or significantly delayed*. These represent missed actions that, if implemented, could have improved outcomes for male victims much earlier:

- 📍 **Establish Dedicated Support Services:** Create a telephone **helpline for male victims** to provide counseling and referrals, and set up a “**drop-in**” **centre** to address men’s needs (offering health advice, legal information,

counseling, etc.). *(No such government-run services were created; as of 2024 there is still no official refuge or drop-in center for men, and helpline support remains limited.)*

🌐 **Provide Counseling and Referral Programs:** Develop **listening and referral programmes** for male victims suffering the emotional and psychological effects of abuse, comparable to those available for female victims. *(Not implemented by statutory agencies – only ad-hoc counseling via small charities materialised, leaving many men without mental health support.)*

🌐 **Raise Awareness & Tackle Stigma:** Launch **public information campaigns** to highlight that men can be victims of domestic violence, enabling them to seek help without shame. All domestic violence education and media campaigns should include content on **female-perpetrated abuse of males** to counteract stereotypes. *(No such awareness campaign was run by government in the 2000s, and male victims remained invisible in most public messaging until very recently.)*

🌐 **Train Agencies and Professionals:** Implement **education and training** across relevant agencies – police, social services, healthcare, judiciary – to **sensitise staff to male victimisation**. This included preparing **training packs for social workers** on handling male abuse cases and ensuring **police officers** are trained so that a male victim is not automatically treated as a perpetrator. GPs and other frontline professionals should be given referral lists for men’s support services. *(No comprehensive, gender-inclusive training program was rolled out; any training focused almost exclusively on female victims, inadvertently reinforcing biases against men.)*

- 🔗 **Adjust Policing and Legal Protocols:** Revise police and legal **procedures** so that **male victims are identified and protected**. The report specifically recommended that protocols be changed to accept the man “is not necessarily the offender” in domestic incidents. It also implied the need for fair handling of accusations (e.g. to prevent misuse of protection orders against male victims). *(Policing policies were not reformed in this way at the time – men continued to report being arrested or disbelieved when they sought help, as bias in procedures persisted.)*

- 🔗 **Develop a Collaborative Response:** Ensure that *all agencies (statutory and voluntary)* recognise male victims and coordinate support. This included improving **inter-agency referrals** (e.g. hospitals referring injured men to counseling) and having domestic abuse specialist organisations extend services to men or create parallel services. *(This holistic approach was not instituted; instead, coordination remained centered on female victims, and men often fell through the cracks of inter-agency cooperation.)*

- 🔗 **Undertake Further Research:** Conduct follow-up **research to establish the extent and context** of male domestic abuse in NI. The 1998 study was qualitative; the authors urged quantitative surveys and data gathering to inform policy. *(This was ignored for over two decades – no official prevalence study or government survey on male victims was carried out, leaving a knowledge gap.)*

(5) 2024: Lingering Issues That Could Have Been Resolved Earlier

Many of the shortcomings in support for male victims that the 2024 ME-IPV report brings to light are direct consequences of the failure to act on the 1998 recommendations. In other words, **had those recommendations been implemented, several issues evident in 2024 might have been significantly reduced or even eliminated:**

- 🌐 **Continued Stigma and Low Awareness:** The 2024 study highlights that stigma remains a major barrier – men fear they won't be believed or will be seen as “unmanly”. This is precisely what a 1999–2000 awareness campaign could have tackled. The enduring stereotypes in 2024 are a legacy of not normalising the idea of male victims earlier.
- 🌐 **Lack of Services and Refuge:** The absence of any refuge or housing support for abused men in 2024 is a glaring gap that would likely not exist had NI established a male shelter or drop-in center when it was recommended. Today's underfunded, patchy support for men reflects how infrastructure that should have been built years ago was not. Men in crisis in 2024 often have nowhere to go – a problem that should have been solved long before.
- 🌐 **Institutional Bias in Police and Courts:** The fact that the ME-IPV participants call for police training and judicial reform in 2024 shows these institutions still often fail male victims. This could have been addressed early on with training and policy changes after 1998. Instead, the bias went unchallenged and became entrenched, so much so that men in 2024 describe very similar mistreatment as reported in 1998. False allegations and one-sided court outcomes – issues still present – could have been mitigated by earlier reforms.

- Neglected Data and Understanding:** Until the 2024 study, NI lacked clear data on male IPV. That gap meant ignorance of the true scale and impact (e.g. severe mental health toll on men, as documented in 2024). If research had been done in the early 2000s, by 2024 the government and public would already understand male victims much better, possibly leading to more proactive services. The current scramble to collect data and “fill literature gaps” could have been an ongoing process rather than starting from scratch now.
- Policy Delay and Limited Accountability:** Finally, the *policy response in NI is years behind*. The 2024 Domestic & Sexual Abuse Strategy that takes an inclusive approach to male victims is essentially two decades late. An earlier inclusion of men in domestic violence strategies (back in the 2000s) might have normalised funding for men’s services and routine reporting on outcomes. The fact that such an inclusive strategy is only now introduced shows a lack of sustained political accountability. Many systemic issues (from funding to legislative nuances) remained unaddressed until they became too large to ignore.

(6) Side By Side Recommendations Comparison

Abuse of Adult Males in Intimate Partner Relationships in Northern Ireland (1998)	Male Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence, ME IPV Study (2024)
Public awareness and stigma	
“That public information programmes be developed to enable victims of such violence to reveal the harm they have suffered without fear of humiliating consequences.” p.72	“Public awareness campaigns with a goal of reducing stigma and polarisation, as well as challenging stereotypical thinking about IPV.” p.13
“All programmes of domestic violence with regard to public education should recognise the complex nature of the subject and include a component sensitising bodies and personnel to evidence of female violence against males.” p.73	“The continued support of the NI government for IPV awareness and stigma reduction campaigns, especially those which are gender age minority inclusive.” p.13
	“Educational materials for the general public featuring a broad spectrum of materials available online or in print, with an aim towards awareness and stigma reduction.” p.13

Abuse of Adult Males in Intimate Partner Relationships in Northern Ireland (1998)	Male Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence, ME IPV Study (2024)
Service provision and support	
“That listening and referral programmes be established to deal with the often severe effects of domestic violence on males, including counselling, advocacy and information.” p.72	“Charities support organisations should explore expanding their remit for additional types of support, particularly legal support advice.” p.13
“That a drop in centre be established to deal with the totality of male victim needs from advice on health to legal information on rights.” p.72 to 73	
“That services dealing with physical injuries to male domestic victims be more sensitised to the emotional effects and need for referral.” p.72	“GPs healthcare professionals should be trained to identify indicators of IPV and respond appropriately to disclosure, including signposting support.” p.13
	“Charities support organisations should signpost clear eligibility requirements for service users.” p.13
Multi agency coordination	
“There must be a commitment to raise consciousness over the effects of male victimisation amongst agency personnel through education and training.” p.72	“All charities support organisations should consider forming a task force or executive advisory group to foster collaboration and a united front against abuse.” p.13
	“Creation of a task force or expert advisory group at NI governmental level for all matters involving IPV would be invaluable.” p.13
Police and justice system	
“That procedures for policing and other investigative personnel should be constructed to accept that the male is not necessarily the offender but sometimes the victim.” p.73	“Police officers should be trained to understand multiple types of IPV, believe victims regardless of gender, and react appropriately to disclosure.” p.13
“That police procedures be structured to avoid the possibility that male guilt is presumed in incidents of reported domestic violence.” p.73	
“Respondents were particularly concerned about their experience with the legal process and consequences in relation to their accommodation and employment.” p.4	“Studies should focus on institutional abuse and its impact, including legal systems and quality of life outcomes.” p.12
Social services and child related systems	
“That training packs be prepared for social workers to recognise and deal with accounts of male victimisation.” p.73	“Social services workers should be trained to understand that fathers can be victims and to challenge harmful stereotypes.” p.13
Health services	
“That GPs and similar personnel be supplied with a list of contacts for referral agencies when male victimisation is reported.” p.73	“GPs healthcare professionals should be trained on identifying IPV and appropriate responses to disclosure.” p.13

Abuse of Adult Males in Intimate Partner Relationships in Northern Ireland (1998)	Male Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence, ME IPV Study (2024)
Data and research	
“Consideration be given to establishing the extent and context of male victimisation.” p.72	“Future research should prioritise specific sub populations including boys, older men, LGBTQ individuals and minority groups.” p.12
	“Future studies should examine psychological mechanisms, cumulative abuse, coercive control and mental health outcomes.” p.12
	“Comparative synthesis research with other countries should be undertaken.” p.12
Legal aid and public understanding of law	
	“The Department of Justice should consider partnering with third sector organisations to release civil legal aid consultation results in educational lay language formats.” p.13
Accommodation Provision	
Provision of a male only safe space equivalent to refuge accommodation “That a ‘drop in’ centre be established to deal with the totality of male victim needs, from advice on health to legal information on rights.” Context within the report links abuse to loss of accommodation and exclusion from existing female focused refuge provision. The term Refuge was not used in association with males at the time. Page 72 to 73	Identification of absence of male refuge provision and need for safe exit from abuse “At present, there is no domestic abuse refuge in NI for male use.” Practice recommendations call for expansion of support provision in response to men being unable to leave abusive environments safely. Pages 16 to 17 and Practice Recommendations page 13

(7) Conclusions

In conclusion, the decision to **shelve the 1998 “Abuse of Adult Males” report severely set back Northern Ireland’s response to male domestic abuse victims.**

For 28 years now, male victims have received minimal recognition, scant services, and often unjust treatment – all of which could have been improved far sooner. The 2024 ME-IPV report starkly illuminates problems (lack of refuges, enduring stigma, institutional biases, etc.) that are, in effect, **the fallout of 1998’s lost opportunities.** Moving forward, this history underscores the importance of implementing research recommendations in a timely manner. Had OFMDFM and

subsequent administrations acted on the evidence in 1998, many male victims would have been spared years of suffering in silence. The task now is to urgently catch up – to build the support infrastructure, awareness, and equitable policies that should have existed all along, and to ensure that no research highlighting victim needs is ever “buried” again.

(8) Sources:

- 📌 Brogden, M. & Nijhar, S. (1998/2004). *Abuse of Adult Males in Intimate Partner Relationships in Northern Ireland*. Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. (Key findings and recommendations of the 1998 study of male domestic abuse victims).
- 📌 Spikol, E. et al. (2024). *Male Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence: The ME-IPV Study*. Commissioner for Victims of Crime NI / Queen’s University Belfast. (Contemporary research highlighting the current state of services, stigma, and needs of male IPV victims in NI).