

IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM: FOR DISABLED MALE VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

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*“It is important to analyse the data,
to make sense and meaning for everyone
involved in, and affected by, the policy.”*
[The NICS guide to making policy that works \(2004\)](#)



MEN'S ALLIANCE
NORTHERN IRELAND

Against Domestic Abuse

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IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM: **FOR DISABLED MALE VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE**

Men's Alliance NI has prepared this report to assist the Department for Communities to gather and consider relevant qualitative and quantitative data and fulfill their statutory obligations to promote equality of opportunity when developing and implementing the NI Disability Strategy.

The following pages provide information on the experiences, needs and significant barriers encountered by disabled male victims and survivors of domestic abuse in Northern Ireland

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The Relevant Human Rights Legislative Framework

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.

[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 should also consider the experiences and needs of men and women with intersecting protected characteristics. For example, by ensuring that their services are available and accessible to older disabled men experiencing abuse from a partner, carer or family member.

[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 covered by the Charter, irrespective of their gender.

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

[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, including sex. Even [The Istanbul Convention](#) encourages State Parties to apply the Convention to all victims of domestic violence.

Part One: Experiences of Abuse

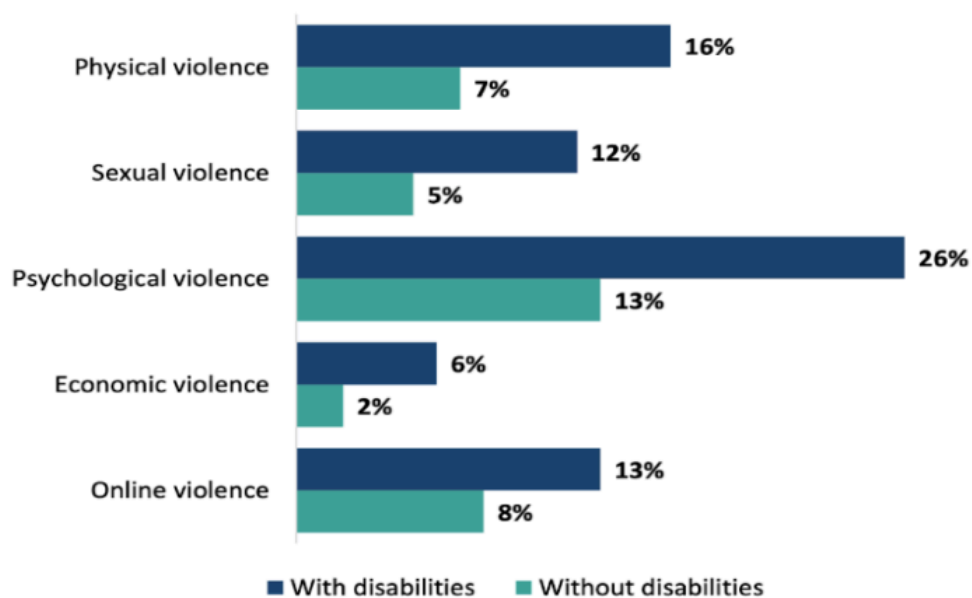
Disabled People's Experience of Domestic and Sexual Abuse

International systematic reviews highlight the greater risk of violence generally for disabled people, showing they are substantially more likely to experience threats of violence, physical abuse and sexual assault.¹

UK ONS annual crime surveys show that disabled people experience domestic abuse at higher proportions than non disabled people.² Disabled men and disabled women also experience sexual abuse at higher proportions to non disabled men and non disabled women respectively.³

Troublingly, recent research by NISRA for the Executive Office (TEO) found that respondents with disabilities reported experiencing physical (16%) sexual (12%) psychological (26%) and economic (6%) forms of violence at levels at least 50% higher than non disabled respondents.⁴

Figure 1: Experience of Violence in the last five years, by disability.



¹ See: Hughes, et al. (2012): [Prevalence and risk of violence against adults with disabilities: a systematic review & meta-analysis of observational studies](#) and also Trevillion et al (2012) [Experiences of Domestic Violence: A Systematic Review & Meta-Analysis](#). PLoS ONE 7(12): e51740.

² Mankind Initiative (2021): [Male victims of domestic abuse and partner abuse: 55 key facts](#).

³ ONS [Sexual offences victim characteristics \(2025\)](#) and [Disability and crime, UK \(2019\)](#)

⁴ NISRA (2022): [Ending Violence Against Women & Girls: Experiences / attitudes of adults in NI](#)

Disabled Men's Experience of Domestic and Sexual Abuse

A landmark study by QUB into male experiences of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in NI concluded that the issue is '**a significant public health issue which warrants immediate attention**', that Public Authorities, including DfC, should act to support male victims and that the creation of an Executive task force would be 'invaluable'.⁵

Although not disaggregated by disability, the study found that psychological aggression (78%), coercive control (69%), and physical assault (50%) were the most common forms of abuse experienced by male victims.

Office of National Statistics (ONS) crime surveys show that disabled men experience domestic abuse in higher numbers than non disabled women.⁶ Recent research by NISRA also indicates similar trends for NI.⁷

Research into the experiences of violence by adults in NI found that disabled people experienced all types of violence at significantly higher rates compared to non disabled people. Although not disaggregated by disability, the same study found that adult men experience similar levels of physical, economic and online violence when compared to adult women.⁸

Sexual violence was the type of violence least experienced by males (2%) when compared to females (11%).⁹ This is consistent with PSNI data that indicates that approximately one in five victims of sexual abuse are male.¹⁰

Although not disaggregated by disability, a similar study into the experiences of violence by 16 year old children found that: young males (47%) experience online abuse at similar levels to young females (50%), and experience more verbal abuse in person, (69%) and physical assault (59%) than young women (60% & 46%).¹¹

⁵ Spikol et al (2025): [Male Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence](#)

⁶ Mankind Initiative (2021): [Male victims of domestic abuse and partner abuse: 55 key facts.](#)

⁷ NISRA (2022): [Ending Violence Against Women & Girls: Experiences / attitudes of adults in NI](#)

⁸ See table 1 on the previous page.

⁹ NISRA (2022): [Ending Violence Against Women & Girls: Experiences / attitudes of adults in NI](#)

¹⁰ CVCNI (2022): [The impact of third party disclosure practice on victims of sexual abuse in NI](#)

¹¹ NISRA (2022): [Ending Violence Against Women & Girls: Experiences & Attitudes of 16 year olds in NI.](#)

Mental Health & Suicide

The 2024 QUB study found that: 59% of male victims met the caseness criteria for anxiety, 72% for depression, and 67% for PTSD. 72% had thoughts of ending their life and of these, 92% had formulated a plan to take their life, and 47% had made at least one attempt.¹²

Approximately 75% of suicides in NI are male.¹³ There is a strong correlation between abuse and suicidal ideation and attempts. A domestic homicides review featuring male victims of domestic abuse found that opportunities to help them were missed due to gender bias and outdated stereotypes. This bias dually inhibited male victims from reporting their abuse and public support services from recognising them as victims.¹⁴

Older Disabled Men's Experience of Elder abuse

Older victims are significantly more likely to have a disability which often increases their dependency on an abuser who may also be their carer.¹⁵

A significant 2024 report estimated that over 100,000 older people in Northern Ireland experience abuse.¹⁶ Earlier research focused on financial abuse found that 21% of older people were affected.¹⁷ Despite this, it remains a low-profile issue compared to other forms of safeguarding.

Roughly 1 in every 3 calls to the Hourglass helpline concerned male victims, which the charity believes is "the tip of the iceberg". Economic abuse is the most common abuse type experienced by older male victims, closely followed by psychological abuse.¹⁸

Older male victims are more likely to suffer from physical abuse than female victims.¹⁹ In cases of psychological abuse, they are also significantly more likely to be dependent on the perpetrator than older female victims.²⁰

¹² Spikol et al (2025): [Male Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence](#).

¹³ NISRA (2025): [Profiling Suicide Deaths in Northern Ireland: A Policy Brief](#).

¹⁴ Bates, L et al (2021): [What can we learn from Domestic Homicide Reviews with male victims?](#)

¹⁵ Safe Lives (2016): [Older people and domestic abuse spotlight](#)

¹⁶ Hourglass (2024): [Safer Ageing Index: Northern Ireland](#)

¹⁷ COPNI (2016): [Financial Abuse of Older People in Northern Ireland: The Unsettling Truth](#)

¹⁸ Hourglass (2023): [Older Male Victims – Stereotyped Harm?](#)

¹⁹ Melchiorre et al (2016): [Abuse of Older Men in Seven European Countries](#).

²⁰ Amstadter et al (2011): [Incident and perpetrator characteristics of elder mistreatment differ by gender](#).

Disabled Children and Young People who Witness or Experience Abuse
Approximately 19,000 children in NI are estimated to be exposed to "frequent and ongoing" domestic violence between adults in their home.²¹

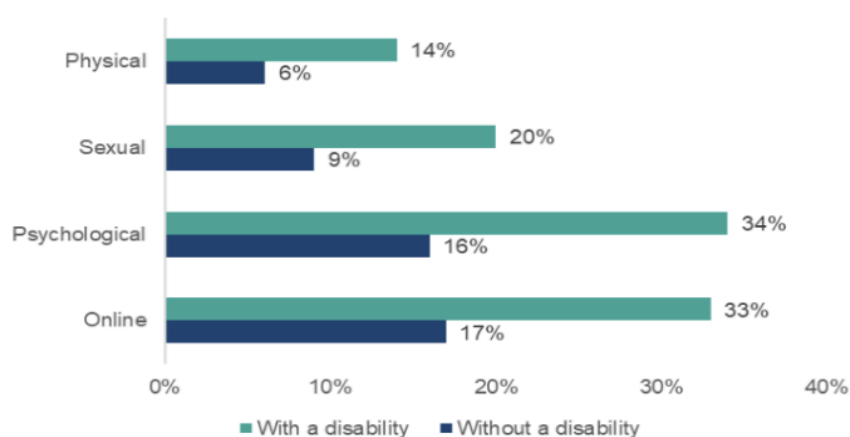
Many children witness or experience violence by both partners. This is a complexity largely ignored by patriarchal perspective research methodology that prefers to promote a clean victim versus perpetrator narrative.²²

Recent serious case reviews have concluded that children's services and other agencies can fail to grasp the "*complex dynamics*" of domestic abuse within a family and make persistent assumptions about the perpetrator of violence within households, despite clear evidence to the contrary.²³

Data shows that children in NI are disproportionately affected by sexual offences. Similar to females, data for male victims by age demonstrates a significantly higher incidence rate among the under 18 male population.²⁴

A recent NI study found that 40% of 16 year olds reported experiencing at least one form of violence in their own relationships.²⁵ Disabled 16 year olds reported disproportionately more experience of violence than non disabled 16 year olds across all all abuse types.²⁶

Figure 2: 16 Year Old Experience of Violence, by Disability.



²¹ QUB (2015): [Research Review: The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children](#).

²² The most comprehensive analysis of domestic violence research conducted worldwide shows the most common form of IPV is bidirectional (58%). [PASK \(2012\): The Partner Abuse State of Knowledge Project](#).

²³ See: [National Review: Arthur Labinjo-Hughes & Star Hobson](#) & [Social workers miss complex dynamics](#).

²⁴ Of the 825 males who were a victim of a sexual assault, 605 were under the age of 18 (73%).

²⁵ [Online Safety Hub Analysis of NISRA \(2023\): Experiences and attitudes of 16 year olds in NI](#)

²⁶ NISRA (2024): [Ending Violence Against Women Girls: Experiences and attitudes of 16 year olds in NI](#)

Disabled Men's Experience of Abuse in Institutional Settings

Media coverage of the Muckamore Abbey Hospital Inquiry has helped to highlight the impact of abuse experienced by vulnerable disabled males living in institutional settings.

Inquiry testimony has highlighted harrowing gendered incidents of abuse. For example, in one incident a staff member allegedly threatened to "*cut off*" a resident's penis if he spoke out about the abuse.²⁷ In another incident a male patient's genitals were "*bruised so badly that they turned black.*"²⁸

Testimony from families also described male patients being punched, kicked, and dragged across floors with their genitals exposed.²⁹ In one foundational case, CCTV footage showed a male patient being punched in the stomach and swung around by his arm by staff.³⁰

The inquiry revealed widespread abuse and a "toxic culture of impunity" where vulnerable, often non-verbal males were subjected to "inhuman and degrading treatment", including being placed in a seclusion room that was likened by some to a "dungeon".³¹

While Muckamore is unique in its scale as the UK's largest adult safeguarding case, such instances highlight a recurring pattern of isolation, physical neglect, and abuse of vulnerable disabled adults in NI.

²⁷ ITV (2024): [Muckamore- Inquiry Hears of Harrowing-Staff Threats.](#)

²⁸ BBC (2023): [Muckamore inquiry: Ex-patient's father says son's genitals bruised.](#)

²⁹ BBC (2025): [How a CCTV error exposed a major abuse scandal.](#)

³⁰ BBC (2025): [Nature and extent of Muckamore abuse at heart of inquiry.](#)

³¹ BBC (2018): [Muckamore Abbey seclusion room was 'dark dungeon'.](#)

Disabled Men's Experience of Abuse By Carers

Cases such as the conviction of Tom Somerset-How's abusers have helped to highlight the impact of abuse of disabled men in caring contexts. Tom, who had cerebral palsy and was almost entirely blind, was kept in squalid conditions for four years while his abusers treated him as a "cash cow" to fund their lifestyle and drug use.³²

In a landmark family court case involving economic abuse of a vulnerable blind and illiterate male victim, the court found his wife had systematically exploited his finances deceptively during a void marriage.³³

According to the ManKind Initiative male victims in such high-control scenarios find that abusers can weaponise disability by withholding medication, mobility equipment, or basic care to maintain control.³⁴

Disabled Men's Intersectional Experience of Abuse

Disabled men's experience of abuse can also be impacted and informed by additional personal characteristics and circumstances. These can include circumstances such as homelessness or living in a rural area, and characteristics protected under human rights law such as sexual orientation, ethnic origin, political opinion and persons with dependants.

For example, research has examples such as the case of a 17 year old disabled boy who experienced prolonged abuse specifically because family members suspected he was gay.³⁵

A key recommendation in the recent QUB report into men in NI who have experienced IPV was that further research should prioritise specific subpopulations with targeted studies, including: transgender/transmasculine men and men in same-sex relationships; Ethnic/cultural minorities; IPV experiences of boys (13-17); and IPV experiences of older men (+65).³⁶

³² BBC (2023): [Chichester: Wife and carer jailed for enslaving disabled husband.](#)

³³ [DP v EP \(Conduct; Economic Abuse; Needs\) \[2023\] EWFC 6.](#)

³⁴ Mankind Initiative (2020): [Male Victims of Coercive Control: Experiences and Impact.](#)

³⁵ Macdonald et al (2021) [Disability, Hate Crime and the Intersectionality of Hate Relationships.](#)

³⁶ Spikol et al (2025): [Male Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence.](#)

Disabled Men's Experience of Psychological Abuse

NISRA research findings indicate that one in four adult disabled people (26%) experience psychological violence.³⁷

Although not disaggregated by disability, research into the experiences of adult victims of IPV across the UK (including NI) found that male victims experience persistent and severe patterns of coercive control including:

- **Threats** - threats to harm (66%), threats to harm self (49%) and threats to disclose damaging information (66%).
- **Intimidation** - being nasty to friends or family (74%), smashing property (57%), being forced to do unwanted things (84%).
- **Isolation** - restricting time spent with family / friends (84%), limiting activities or movement (80%), checking up on movements (76%).
- **Economic abuse** - controlling money (71%), refusing to share expenses (75%), or making it difficult to work or study (87%).
- **Emotional abuse** - such as putting the person down (79%), showing them up in public (77%), or gaslighting (84%).
- **Using children** - threatening to take children away (84%), arguing in front of children (85%) making them feel bad about children (88%).

False allegations (or the threat of them) to the police and social services as a pattern of abuse were experienced by almost two thirds of male victims.³⁸

Male victims are roughly twice as likely as women to report being falsely accused of abuse.³⁹ Research highlights that the DARVO tactic (Deny, Attack, Reverse Victim and Offender) is particularly effective against men because it exploits existing gender stereotypes and "rape myths" that suggest domestic violence is something men do to women. This often results in a "perpetual state of hyperarousal" for male survivors who fear that any attempt to seek help will trigger further retaliatory accusations.⁴⁰

³⁷ NISRA (2022): [Ending Violence Against Women & Girls: Experiences / attitudes of adults in NI](#)

³⁸ Spikol et al (2025): [Male Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence](#).

³⁹ [False accusations preventing men from reporting domestic abuse | Teesside University](#)

⁴⁰ Harsey, et al (2020): [What Is Abusive, Gaslighting and Coercive Behaviour in a Relationship](#).

Part Two: Experiences of Barriers to Support

Barriers to Support Encountered by Disabled Victims and Survivors

Disabled people encounter multifaceted barriers when seeking help, these can include, informational, attitudinal, structural and systemic obstacles. For example, support services personnel often lack training on disability specific needs, leading to inadequate or insensitive responses. Societal prejudices, including ableism, can also result in disbelief or minimization of abuse reports, particularly in legal systems.⁴¹

Disabled individuals may also face intentional isolation by abusers, who exploit dependencies to control access to external support. Shame, fear of retaliation, and hope that the abuser will change further deter help-seeking, with 71% of disabled survivors reporting such emotional barriers.⁴²

Disabled people also often lack accessible services due to limited resources, lack of transportation (especially in rural communities), or structural limitations of service facilities.⁴³

Access to refuges, intended as safe havens, pose particular difficulties for disabled individuals due to inaccessibility and resource limitations. Only about 10% of refuge spaces in the UK are accessible to those with physical disabilities, with many lacking wheelchair ramps or adapted facilities.⁴⁴

Approximately only 49% of domestic abuse services offer full wheelchair access, 17% cater to visually impaired people, and only 13% provide temporary personal care assistants. This scarcity forces many to remain in abusive situations, as alternatives like accessible housing are limited.⁴⁵

Some disabled victims lack the skills or abilities necessary to act independently to seek help. Victims may experience an increased risk of being institutionalized or losing basic decision-making rights if they are viewed as unable to care for themselves without help from their abuser.⁴⁶

⁴¹ House of Lords Library (2024); [Challenges faced by people with disabilities.](#)

⁴² Safe Lives (2019); [Safe and Well: Mental health and domestic abuse.](#)

⁴³ Cabinet Office Disability Unit (2025); [The lived experience of disabled people in the UK.](#)

⁴⁴ BBC (2018); [Why disabled women can't access all refuges.](#)

⁴⁵ Safe Lives (2022); [Domestic abuse faced by blind and partially sighted people.](#)

⁴⁶ NCADV; [Domestic Violence and Disabilities.](#)

Barriers to Support Encountered by Disabled Male Victims and Survivors

Disabled male victims face additional gendered barriers to reporting and seeking help, including stigma, fear of not being believed or losing their children, heightened vulnerability to DARVO retaliation tactics⁴⁷, and concerns about negative social responses, prejudice and discrimination from some support service providers.

Research by the ManKind Initiative found that nearly two-thirds of male victims experienced false allegations—or the threat of them—to police and social services as a persistent pattern of coercive control.⁴⁸

Access to refuges, intended as safe havens, are simply not an option for disabled males living in NI as NI is currently the only country in the UK without at least some provision of refuges for male victims.⁴⁹

Access to other crucial domestic abuse services, such as floating support which can assist victims to remain in their home, is also a major issue for disabled males living in NI as they are generally unavailable. DFC and NIHE do not provide floating support to males and the domestic abuse strand of their Supporting People Programme is the only strand restricted by sex discrimination.⁵⁰

Underreporting and Barriers to Disclosure

Men, including disabled men face significant barriers to reporting domestic and sexual abuse. These barriers mean that official figures almost certainly understate the true prevalence of abuse experienced by men.

Although not disaggregated by disability, ONS data indicates that men are 3 times less likely than women to report abuse.⁵¹ A 2024 study indicates that over 50% of men in NI who suffer domestic abuse do not disclose it.⁵²

⁴⁷ DARVO (Deny, Attack, Reverse Victim and Offender) is a manipulative strategy frequently used by abusers when held accountable for their actions. In the context of false allegations and retaliation, the perpetrator uses DARVO to flip the narrative, making themselves appear as the victim of a "false accusation" while attacking the true victim's credibility. This tactic often results in the original victim facing secondary abuse, such as defamation lawsuits, job loss, or unwarranted investigation.

⁴⁸ UCLan and the Mankind Initiative: [Male Victims of Coercive Control: Experiences and Impact](#)

⁴⁹ CVCNI (2025): Mapping Services for Male Adult & Child Victim of Domestic and Sexual Abuse in NI.

⁵⁰ NIHE: [Ending Homelessness Together Homelessness Strategy 2022-27](#)

⁵¹ Mankind Initiative (2023): [Key Facts about Male Victims of Abuse.](#)

⁵² [Domestic abuse: Half of male victims do not report incidents - BBC News](#)

Gaps in Support and Service Provision for Male Victims

NI Executive practices related to gender budgeting, objective needs assessments and service procurement mean that male victims, including disabled male victims, are not provided an equitable standard or range of services and support. This has been understood for well over two decades.

The significant gaps in services were highlighted during the consultation process for the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy (2023 - 2030) when Victim Support NI advised DoJ/H that, for their strategy to meet its vision, adequately funded services, including floating support, must be in place to meet the needs of male victims.⁵³

The NI Commissioner for Victims of Crime commissioned a mapping exercise that found evidence of significant gaps in service provision for male victim-survivors in NI.⁵⁴ The report found that:

- Where dedicated support services are available to male victims in NI, they are provided by grassroots organisations run wholly or in part supported by volunteers and with precarious funding arrangements.
- *'The system is struggling to manage and support the complexity of need for victim-survivors of abuse more generally and that this has resulted in male victim/survivors being "overlooked" when it comes to provision of services and supports.'*
- *There are 'challenging dynamics and contention' within the domestic abuse support sector, particularly between female and male service providers. There was a sense from participants that this is in part fuelled by concerns over funding, which has been noted to contribute more generally to 'siloes working and competitive practices'.*

Report recommendations included: Service improvement, including further exploration of gaps in provision e.g. expansion of refuges; More and sustainable funding; and Raising awareness of the gender-inclusive DASA Strategy.

⁵³ DoJ / DoH (2023): [Draft Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy Consultation Summary Report](#).

⁵⁴ NI Victims of Crime Commissioner (2025): [Mapping Services for Male Adult & Child Victims of DASA](#)