

JUSTICE COMMITTEE

CHILDREN (SCOTLAND) BILL

SUBMISSION FROM GRANDPARENTS APART UK

Over 20 years of helping grandparents the biggest percentage of grandparents we hear from are paternal grandparents who see less or nothing of much-loved grandchildren due to the father being treated differently from the mother when parents don't live together or separate. The mother often becomes the main carer and the dad a visitor if that's allowed. The child suffers because of these assumptions

There is a huge issue within our family law system which treats fathers differently from mothers and domestic violence victims differently because of gender. This has a huge impact on the children involved.

We would not try to denigrate Women's Aid or any other support organisations for women who are victims of domestic abuse, or minimise the need for their services. They do an invaluable job.

However, we see a huge need for men to be protected in the same way and are trying to highlight the inequality within the family law system in practice and implementation. The unintended consequences of protecting women have had an adverse effect on protecting male victims of violence.

Children need the government to recognise that Dads are as important to them as Mums are, to recognise that men are not all bad and women are not all good and to recognise that Dads are victims of abuse too.

We can give many examples of this but following are just a few –

Two fathers in a department of four men in a workplace have Breach of the Peace convictions following a domestic abuse incident when they were the victim. Both events followed the same pattern. Both spent an overnight in police cells, both followed the advice of their solicitor to plead guilty to a reduced charge of BoP instead of facing a trial as the solicitor advised they would probably not be believed. Both had children that witnessed what took place.

One of the female's relatives wrote to the court to support him as she had assaulted her previous partners when she consumed alcohol. He continued the relationship in the same way women often do in this situation and on the next occasion had to barricade himself in the bedroom while she banged and kicked the door when her child was in the next bedroom. Police were called and she was this time removed from the property, but no charges were brought.

One father objected to ongoing obstacles being put in the way of contact, telling him he had to wait half an hour before his son would be available to go with him. Because he raised his voice police were called which resulted in the father being taken to police custody and he too now has a conviction for BoP, pleading guilty on the advice of his solicitor.

Another dad was a victim for years and taken into custody on several occasions. It was only when one of his children was old enough to give evidence in court that it was accepted that he had been the victim for all these years, not the perpetrator.

One adult grandchild told their grandparent about witnessing their father being abused as a child, without retaliating but this was never reported.

Many, many fathers have been victims of coercion and physical abuse. Their behaviour follows exactly that of female victims.

Too many children are in a dangerous situation because our police, courts, and authorities make assumptions about victims and perpetrators. This makes it harder for men to speak out because they feel they won't be believed, they feel embarrassed and they feel afraid of the consequences. Just like women.

Grandparents Apart UK
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