

Loneliness, Impaired Well-being and Partner Abuse Victimisation of Separated Fathers in Wales

Measures of mental well-being and social/emotional isolation were applied to a cohort of fathers seeking assistance from a Welsh charity. The fathers approached the charity predominantly with child arrangement problems after parental separation. Well-being was found to be strongly degraded, and loneliness severely increased, in this cohort compared to general populations. Associations of these dependent variables with nine predictor variables were explored, the latter being: a domestic abuse risk index, low income, allegations of abuse against the father, social services involvement with the family, refusal of the ex-partner to consider mediation, the father's concern about abuse of a child by the ex-partner or her new partner, the father's disability, the restriction of child contact, and an indicator of the father's recognition of his need for emotional support. The fathers' risk from domestic abuse was the variable most strongly associated with poorer well-being and elevated loneliness, as well as with a separate indication of depression/suicidality. The variable which was the second most strongly associated with those three dependent variables was low income, mostly due to unemployment. The findings of the study challenge the notion that serious partner abuse of men is either relatively uncommon compared with that of women, or that it is less impactful.

Keywords: parental separation, fathers, loneliness, well-being, domestic abuse

There is extensive literature on the effects of parental separation on children but gaps exist in data measuring the impact of parental separation on the non-resident parent, usually the father, (Carlson & Turner, 2010), (Nomaguchi, 2012), (Köppen, Kreyenfeld & Trappe, 2020). Lacking in the existing body of research is a distinction between recent separations and those that occurred some years earlier. The subjects of this study are fathers experiencing contemporaneous problems associated with parental separation. In this work, attention is focused on measures of loneliness and mental well-being obtained from a population of separated fathers, and the association of these measures with a range of independent variables, especially domestic abuse. Associations between these factors and depression/suicidality within this population are also examined.

The source of subjects

This study draws upon data collected from men seeking assistance from the Welsh charity FNF Both Parents Matter Cymru (henceforth “the charity”) between July 2019 and July 2020. The primary role of the charity is to assist non-resident parents after parental separation to retain, or obtain, a mutually beneficial involvement in their children’s lives. In the UK, 92% of non-resident parents are fathers, (Hunt & MacLeod, 2008), which is reflected in the sex of the charity’s service users. Prior to the Covid-19 lockdown in the UK in March 2020, most service users made first contact with the charity via monthly meetings in each of ten locations around Wales. During the lockdown there has been no diminution in service user registration but contact is now being made through a helpline, and also via referrals from solicitors and other agencies (citizens’ advice bureaux, social services, mediation services, Welsh Assembly Members, and various charities including Fatherhood Development).

There is a very strong association between parental separation and the incidence of domestic abuse, and this applies to both male and female victims, (ONS, 2019). In 2018, the charity

started a separate service (“Aegis”) for male victims of domestic abuse, which involved (before lockdown) weekly drop-in centres in two locations in South Wales.

The bulk of the charity’s service users are non-resident fathers who are experiencing difficulties with child contact. There is also a smaller but significant number of cases in which the father seeks assistance from the charity over concerns pertaining to risk factors raised about the custodial parent and his/her new partner. In these cases, the father may or may not be content with the extent of his contact if he is not the primary care giver.

Private law Children Act cases in England and Wales: the background

Cases within the family courts of England and Wales which are brought by a parent for the purposes of seeking an order relating to childcare arrangements are known as “private law Children Act cases”. There are now around 55,000 such cases per year, (Ministry of Justice, 2020). Approximately half of the parents have been married and subsequently separated/divorced. The other cases involve parents who remained unmarried and may or may not have been cohabiting. Only 38% of separating parents have recourse to the courts to make child arrangement orders, (MacFarlane, 2019); the rest make custodial decisions without legal intervention.. Therefore, there are nearly three times as many couples with children who separate per year in England and Wales than are seen by the courts, an estimate based on the above figures being 145,000 total families (i.e., $55,000 / 0.38$). With an average of 1.5 children per case, parental separation affects roughly 220,000 children per year in this jurisdiction alone.

The outcomes of these “private law” child arrangement cases, either in terms of the court orders made or in terms of the actual child contact which transpires (the two things diverging substantially) are beyond the scope of this paper. What we can say definitively is that these outcomes are strongly associated with allegations of domestic abuse and the court’s perception of the risks posed by the allegedly abusive parent, (Collins, 2019). Therefore, it is also pertinent

to these outcomes that the incidence of domestic abuse allegations raised in the courts is extremely high, while fewer than 10% of such allegations are subject to any “finding of facts”, discussed further below.

Domestic abuse in the UK: the background

For many years the crime surveys for England and Wales have reported that 33% of adult domestic abuse or partner abuse is against male victims, (ONS, 2019). Large, international meta-analyses have indicated that partner abuse is closer to gender parity, and some studies report men as the majority of victims, (PASK, 2013). 25% of domestic abuse reports to the police in the UK are made by male victims, (ONS, 2019), despite men being less likely to report than female victims, (ONS, 2018a). But this high level of male victimisation diminishes to very low levels of service provision, and hence minimal policy concern, in a succession of stages. In England and Wales some 17% of victims in prosecutions for domestic abuse are male, (ONS, 2017), already less than the 25% of police reports or the 33% of surveyed victims. Only 5% of cases considered by MARACs (multi-agency risk assessment conferences) involve male victims, (ONS, 2018b). Similarly, only 4% of victims accessing IDVA (independent domestic violence advisor) services are male, (ONS, 2018c). Of those domestic abuse victims obtaining support in the community, such as from specialist charities, only 3.6% are men, and only 2.6% of refuge provision is provided to men, (ONS, 2017).

Thus the prevalence of male victims has been successfully minimized through a sequence of different stages of the process. These overlooked interventions have resulted in misleading claims that women are the “overwhelming majority” of victims, in addition to wildly incorrect claims that men are the majority of perpetrators of domestic abuse against other men, claims which are repeated in the UK Parliament, e.g., (Hansard, 2019), and are instrumental in judicial policy, e.g., (Ministry of Justice, 2020). The result is a virtually singular focus on female

victims, manifest in the VAWG (violence against women and girls) policies, e.g., (UK Government, 2017). The significance of male victimisation is minimised in such policies based on sex alone. Despite the discrepancy, the requirements of the Equality Act (UK Government, 2010) can be claimed as met based on the differing “needs” of the two sexes. The error behind this policy lies directly in the process of filtering described above (i.e., the attrition of male victims at various stages of the process), or by claims that the victimisation identified in surveys is misleading because men are not impacted as seriously as women by abuse.

The association between partner abuse and separation has been quantified in the crime surveys for England and Wales for many years. In 2018/19, for married couples responding to the survey, 2.3% of women and 1.6% of men reported partner abuse in the last year, (ONS, 2019). Among separated people those figures were about 8 times larger at 18.1% and 12.3% respectively. However, the prevalence rises still further to about 50% for cases of disputed child contact within the family courts in England and Wales, (Barnett, 2020). Fewer than 10% of these claims are subject to any meaningful examination, (Barnett, 2020). This is the context within which the cases providing the data used in this study arise.

Method / data collection / ethics

The charity has been in operation since 2009, but data collection and record keeping have been subject to maturation. In July 2019 the charity introduced a standardised six-page “service user pack” (SUP) which records basic data about the client and his/her particular problem concerning which they have sought the charity’s assistance. Invariably this involves child arrangements in some form. (Purely financial issues are notable by their absence). The last three pages of the SUP consist of a domestic abuse risk assessment tool and measures of well-being and loneliness, discussed further below. The SUP is then uploaded into our confidential Caseworker system which also houses all other documentation, correspondence, etc., relating to the case. Strict adherence to confidentiality rules in terms of access to these data is essential,

both for GDPR reasons and also because they mostly relate to live family law cases, to which legal restrictions apply.

The SUP includes the service user's agreement to the charity's confidentiality and data protection policies, and the possible usage of data in fully anonymised form for research purposes, such as this paper.

Completion of the SUP is partly a supervised process and takes typically 45 minutes. Prior to Covid-19 lockdown this was done as a face-to-face exercise, but it has necessarily been done by 'phone and internet during lockdown. Usage of the full SUP and associated recording within the Caseworker system came about gradually during July to October 2019, and was fully embedded by November 2019. However, for logistical reasons, not all cases achieve a fully completed SUP.

Between 1st July 2019 and 19th July 2020 the charity registered 418 new cases, of which 271 (65%) had a completed SUP within Caseworker and the service user was a father. Due to the slow start in July to September 2019, the SUP data relates to an equivalent of about 10 full months operation of the charity. From this dataset of 271 male service users, 196 (72%) either self-reported being the victim of domestic abuse, or this was apparent from the domestic abuse risk index (see below). 138 service users with a completed SUP (51%) reported that allegations of domestic abuse had been made against them by their partner/ex-partner.

From the dataset of 271 cases, 33 (12%) involved child protection issues other than any risk posed by the father, almost all associated with the father claiming that the mother had abused the child(ren). In 63 cases (23%) social services were already engaged with the family at the time the service user registered with the charity.

Demographics

The charity's client base is not an unbiased cross-section of the Welsh population. This is inevitable given the charity's main function in terms of assisting separated parents. Marriage has become markedly less popular over the last 50 years, but this is strongly demographic related, (Benson & McKay, 2015). In the highest earning demographics, marriage has become only marginally less popular. In contrast, in the lowest income demographics the reduction in marriage has been dramatic, for example only 25% of new mothers in the lowest quintile of income are married, (Benson & McKay, 2015). The decline of marriage in these demographics has led to an increased prevalence of cohabitation. But cohabiting couples separate at several times the rate of married couples, (Benson, 2017). Consequently, it is inevitable that services for separated people will be skewed to the lower socioeconomic classes. This is further exacerbated by the withdrawal of legal aid from civil court cases since April 2013, (UK Government, 2012), which leads to low earners, and those on benefits, seeking free assistance from charities such as FNF Both Parents Matter Cymru.

As a result, 56% of the charity's service users are unemployed, and 70% have an income of less than £12,000 pa. At least 6% are BAME and 18% report a disability. This study is confined to male service users. 8% of these fathers did not have formal Parental Responsibility (PR). It is noteworthy that 92% of fathers did have PR.

Loneliness and well-being measures

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 adopts a range of indicators of well-being for the Welsh public, (Welsh Government, 2019). Two of these are, (i) the average mental well-being of the Welsh people, and, (ii) the percentage who are lonely. The measures adopted by the Welsh government were the Warwick-Edinburgh mental well-being scale, and the de Jong Gierveld loneliness scale. The charity has adopted these same measures.

For mental well-being the shorter Warwick-Edinburgh scale has been used, (WEMWBS Resource, 2018). This asks seven questions (such as “I have been feeling optimistic about the future”) with five-point scoring from “never” (score 1) to “always” (score 5). Hence the possible scores range from 7 to 35, with higher scores indicating better well-being.

For loneliness the longer de Jong Gierveld scale has been used, (de Jong Gierveld & Kamphuls, 1985). This combines both the social loneliness and the emotional loneliness sub-scales. Only the combined score will be used here. It consists of eleven questions, which variously may be positively phrased (e.g., “there are enough people I feel close to”) or negatively phrased (e.g., “I often feel rejected”). Each question scores either 0 or 1, see (MVDA, 2020), so the total score lies in the range 0 to 11 with higher scores indicating greater loneliness. The last page of the SUP contains the Warwick-Edinburgh and de Jong Gierveld questionnaires and is handed, or emailed, to the service user to complete independently or completed over the phone. The resulting Warwick-Edinburgh and de Jong Gierveld scores will be treated as dependent variables in regressions.

Domestic abuse risk index (RIC score)

Pages 4 and 5 of the SUP consist of the Safelives-Dash domestic abuse Risk Identification Checklist (RIC), (Safelives, 2020). This is the same tool which is virtually universal within the female domestic abuse sector in the UK. It consists of 24 questions with yes/no/don't know responses. Each “yes” scores one point. The higher the score, the greater the assessed risk. A score of 14 or more is taken to indicate a high risk of abuse, a level which may suggest referral to a MARAC. Use of the RIC tool requires supervised completion by a trained person. The national manager of the charity is trained as an IDVA. The RIC score will be treated as an independent (predictor) variable in the regressions, together with a range of other independent variables (defined below).

Loneliness data

Figure 1 displays in histogram form the distribution of de Jong Gierveld loneliness scores from the charity’s male service users. Table 1 compares these scores with a large scale survey of the general adult male population of England, (ONS, 2018d), in ranges which correspond with the verbal descriptions used in that source. Figure 1 shows that the charity’s service users are starkly distinct from the general population in terms of loneliness, the mode of the distribution being at the maximum possible loneliness, compared with the general population for which the mode lies in the “hardly ever lonely” range. 40% of the charity’s service users are severely lonely (“often/always”) compared with only 5% in the general adult population. 67.7% of the charity’s service users are lonely more often than “occasionally”, compared with 19% of the general adult male English population, (ONS, 2018d), or 16% of the general adult male Welsh population, (Welsh Government, 2018). The extreme degree of social/emotional isolation evident in this cohort of separated fathers is one of the main observations of this study.

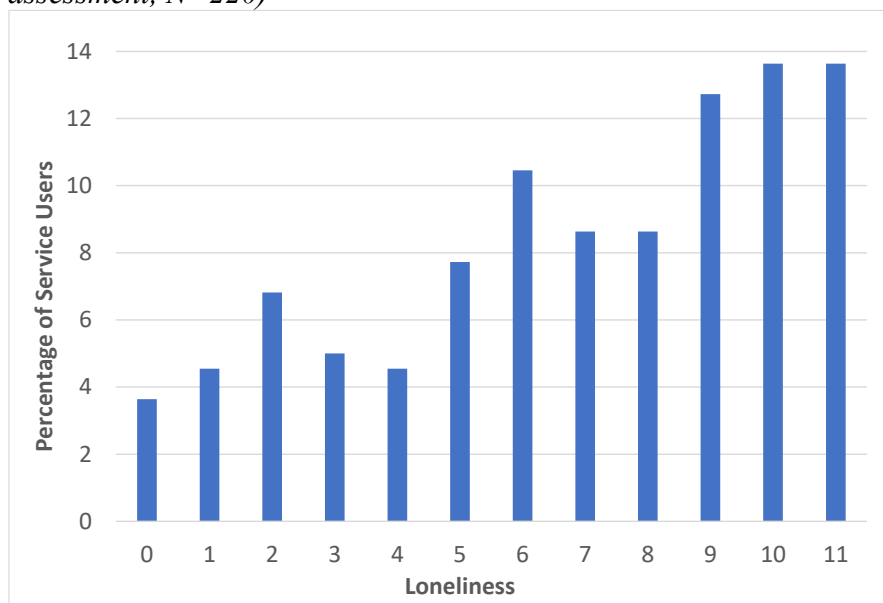
Table 1

Loneliness of the charity’s male service users cf general (English) adult male population

loneliness score	Description	General Population	This Paper
0	Never lonely	27%	3.6%
1 - 2	Hardly ever lonely	32%	11.4%
3 – 5	Occasionally lonely	22%	17.3%
6 - 8	Lonely some of the time	14%	27.7%
9 - 11	Often/always lonely	5%	40.0%

Figure 1

De Jong Gierveld loneliness score (percentage of service users who completed the assessment, N=220)

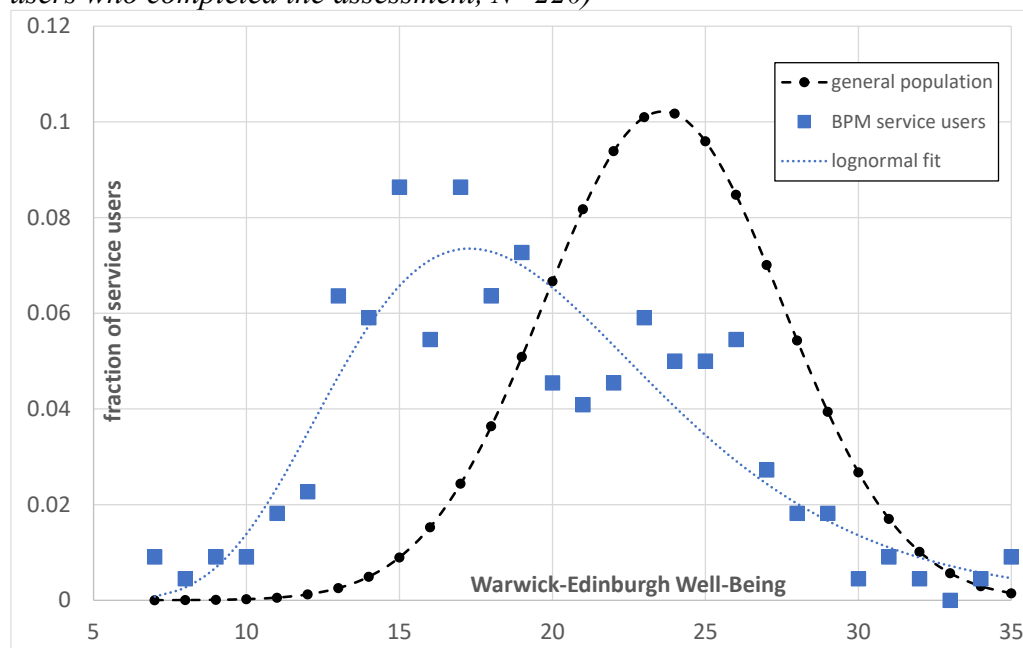


Well-being data

Results of the Warwick-Edinburgh mental well-being assessments are plotted in Figure 2 in comparison with the general adult population of England, (WEMWBS Resource, 2011), where the latter is represented by a normal distribution with a mean (or median) of 23.6 and a standard deviation of 3.9. To aid visualisation the best lognormal fit to the service user data is also plotted on Figure 2. The median is 18.9 and the mode is 17.4. It is clear from Figure 2 that the separated fathers have mental well-being skewed to abnormally poor levels, the median being shifted down by 4.7 points. 78% of these separated fathers have poorer well-being than the mean of the general population. 28% of the separated fathers have a well-being score of 15 or lower, which has a prevalence of less than 2% in the general population.

Figure2

Shorter Warwick-Edinburgh mental well-being of the general population, (fraction of service users who completed the assessment, N=220)

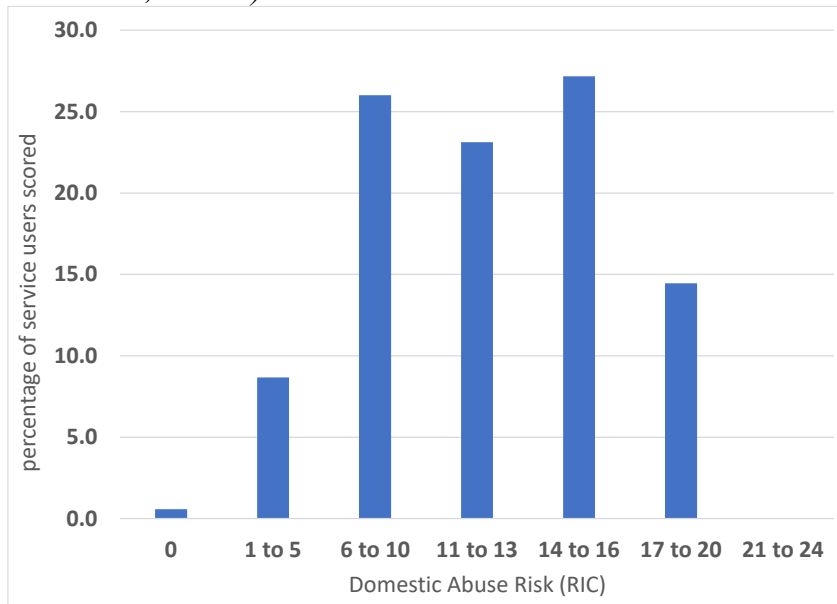


Domestic abuse (RIC scores)

173 male service users completed a supervised RIC assessment (64% of the total service users within this study of 271 cases). The results are displayed in histogram form in Figure 3. The median RIC score was 12. 41% of service users with a RIC assessment were assessed in the “high risk” category, having a RIC score of 14 or greater. In 23 cases (13% of assessed cases) the charity’s IDVA judged the risk sufficient to motivate a MARAC referral. The average RIC score for these 23 cases was 16. However, few of these were actually referred to MARAC. It is no longer the charity’s policy to do so. The reason is several experiences with breaches of security within the MARAC process which led to the abuser discovering the victim’s address and thereby furthering the abuse. The charity no longer regards the MARAC process as a safe recourse for men.

Figure 3

Domestic abuse risk index (RIC score) for the separated fathers (percentage of service users with a RIC, N=173)



Other independent variables

Ordinary linear regressions were carried out based on nine independent (predictor) variables, denoted V1 to V9. These are defined as follows,

- V1 is the RIC score normalised by 14, so that $V1 \geq 1$ indicates high risk.

All the remaining variables are binary, taking values 0 or 1, as follows,

- V2: If the service user's income is less than £12,000 pa then $V2 = 1$
- V3: If allegations of domestic abuse were made against the father then $V3 = 1$
- V4: If the service user requested to join the charity's "Buddy" scheme then $V4 = 1$. (This is a scheme which provides emotional support, so V4 is an indication of the service user's own recognition that he is in need of emotional support).
- V5: If social services were already involved with the family when the service user registered with the charity then $V5 = 1$
- V6: If the partner/ex-partner has refused formal mediation then $V6 = 1$
- V7: If the partner/ex-partner or her family or new partner were reported by the service user as having been abusive to a child then $V7 = 1$
- V8: If the service user has a disability then $V8 = 1$
- V9: If the service user's contact with his child(ren) was being prohibited or unduly restricted then $V9 = 1$

Correlations

Pearson correlations between the loneliness scores and the independent variables, where significant ($p \leq 0.05$), are given in Table 2 together with their p values. Correlations with the mental well-being scores are also given. Note that the correlations align with expectation in terms of sign, i.e., those for loneliness are positive while those for well-being are negative. Note that the correlations with domestic abuse victimisation of the father are most significant, while low income (mostly unemployment) is the second most significant.

Table 2

Pearson correlations between loneliness or well-being and the independent variables, where significant (no correlations significant for variables V7, V8, V9)

Variable	Loneliness (deJong-Gierveld)		Well-being (Warwick-Edinburgh)	
	correlation	p	correlation	p
V1	0.23	0.004	-0.26	0.001
V2	0.23	0.001	-0.19	0.007
V3	0.14	0.045	n/s	> 0.05
V4	0.14	0.044	-0.18	0.013
V5	n/s	> 0.05	n/s	> 0.05
V6	n/s	> 0.05	-0.18	0.01

Regressions

Ordinary linear regressions for the dependent variables loneliness and well-being were carried out in terms of the nine independent variables. The resulting coefficients are given in Table 3. The linear fits accounted for 40% of the variation in the well-being measure and 44% of the variation in the loneliness measure. Also included in Table 3 are the coefficients obtained when variables which do not have a significant correlation with the dependent variable are excluded from the regression. The salient feature of all fits is that the dominant predictor variable is the domestic abuse index (RIC score) in each case, variable V1.

Table 3

Regression coefficients for loneliness and well-being (for cases where all variables were known, N=156)

Dep.variable	Inter.	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5	V6	V7	V8	V9
loneliness	4.88	2.09	0.70	0.15	0.15	0.64	0.75	-0.43	-0.89	-0.68
loneliness	4.79	1.88	0.65	0.14	0.23	0	0	0	0	0
well-being	22.95	-4.86	-0.54	0.52	-0.48	0.61	-1.69	1.55	1.73	-0.11
well-being	22.97	-3.95	-0.15	0	-0.34	0	-1.74	0	0	0

Depression and Suicidality

A further dependent variable was defined according to the service users' self-reporting of depression and/or suicidality. Depression most often involved medication. The variable was defined as depression = 1, suicidal ideation = 2, suicide attempt = 3, none of these = 0. The Pearson correlation of this variable with the nine independent variables was calculated and found to be significant ($p < 0.05$) only for three variables: domestic abuse (V1), low income (V2) and disability (V8). These correlations are given in Table 4. The strongest correlation was with domestic abuse victimisation of the father, and the second strongest was with low income, as was found for loneliness and well-being (Table 2). However, the significant correlation between disability and depression/suicidality is new and specific to this dependent variable.

Also shown in Table 4 are the correlations between depression/suicidality and loneliness or well-being. Not surprisingly there are significant correlations with both, and with the anticipated sign. The negative correlation between the shorter Warwick-Edinburgh well-being measure and client reported depression/suicidality is the largest correlation identified in this study.

Ordinary linear regression for depression/suicidality against the nine independent variables yields the coefficients given in Table 5. The dominant regression term is again that for domestic abuse victimisation of the father. This fit accounts for 49% of the variation in the dependent

variable. Also given in Table 5 are the regression coefficients when only the variables with significant correlations are included (V1, V2, V8).

Table 4

Pearson correlations between depression/suicidality and the independent variables, where significant, and also with loneliness and well-being

Variable	depression/suicidality	
	correlation	p
V1	0.32	0.0001
V2	0.22	0.005
V8	0.20	0.012
loneliness	0.26	0.0002
well-being	-0.35	10 ⁻⁶

Table 5

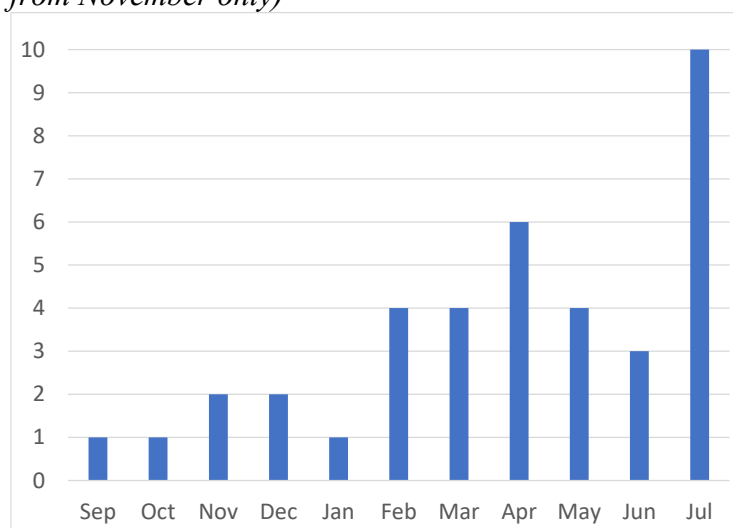
Regression coefficients for depression/suicidality (for cases where all variables were known, N=156)

Inter.	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5	V6	V7	V8	V9
0.19	0.71	0.23	-0.15	0.09	-0.04	0.01	-0.01	0.30	0.12
0.28	0.66	0.22	0	0	0	0	0	0.26	0

Of the 173 service users who addressed the question, 39 (23%) had recently experienced suicidal ideation, of which 8 (5%) had attempted suicide. This is an abnormally high percentage. It appears to be increasing (Figure 4). It remains to be seen if July 2020 was anomalous.

Figure 4

Number of service users reporting suicidal ideation or past suicide attempts by month, September 2019 to July 2020 (noting that the dataset involved complete month's statistics as from November only)



Discussion

The experience of the staff and volunteers working with the charity is that most service users are in a state of considerable distress. Consequently, it is no surprise that the measured mental well-being of these separated fathers is skewed to substantially lower values than the general population. However, it is of concern that such extremely poor well-being scores are so common in this population, 28% having a well-being score of 15 or lower, which has a prevalence of less than 2% in the general population.

It is also no surprise that the charity's service users have elevated loneliness scores, because the charity knows that social isolation is one of their principal difficulties. This comes about because men's social circle tends to focus around just two centres: work and family. As most of the charity's service users are unemployed, after separation both centres of social contact have failed, leaving the man without social support at a time when it is most needed. Despite being readily explicable, it is still rather alarming to find that the degree of loneliness is so marked that the mode of the distribution lies at the maximum measurable loneliness. 40% of the charity's service users are severely lonely compared with only 5% in the general adult population.

In view of the service users' markedly reduced well-being and commonly severe social isolation it is to be expected that suicidality would have an elevated prevalence. This was borne out by 39 of those asked the question (23%) having recently experienced suicidal ideation, of which 8 (5%) had attempted suicide. The link between separation and men's suicide is well known, though perhaps not as well established by UK data as it might be. (Collins, 2019) analysed data referenced in (Samaritans, 2012) and (Evans, Scourfield & Moore, 2016), none of it from Great Britain, and concluded that separation increases the suicide rate for both sexes, but more so for men than for women. The suicide rate for men after separation was estimated

to be 8 to 12 times higher than for women in the general population. To the effect of separation must be added the effect of domestic abuse in elevating suicide rates further, and again this is more marked in men than in women. In 2017/18, in England and Wales, 11% of male victims of partner abuse tried to take their own lives compared to 7.2% of female victims, (ONS, 2018b).

As regards associations with the independent variables, the elevated loneliness, the reduced well-being, and the elevated prevalence of depression/suicidality were all most strongly correlated with the men's domestic abuse victimisation (RIC score). This variable was also clearly dominant in the regressions. The greater significance of the fathers' victimisation by domestic abuse than any of the other eight independent variables is one of the main findings of this study.

The second most significant independent variable was low income, less than £12,000 pa (generally due to being unemployed), and this was again the case for all three dependent variables: loneliness, well-being and depression/suicidality. Other independent variables were significant for some dependent variables but not all, namely allegations against the father (V3), the man's recognition of his need for emotional support (V4), refusal of the ex-partner to consider mediation (V6), and, in the case of depression/suicidality, the man's disability (V8).

An initially surprising finding was that frustrated contact with children (variable V9) was not significant. On reflection this is less surprising because essentially all service users were having some form of child arrangement problem. Whilst 65% were experiencing prohibited or restricted contact, the rest had other concerns which invariably focussed on their children, typically anxiety about potential abuse by the ex-partner or her family or new partner. Consequently, the insignificance of variable V9 most likely indicates that both types of case are equally distressing. The effect of prohibited contact could only be isolated by comparison

with a control group experiencing no child arrangement problems, but the charity has no such control group.

There continues to be a political and judicial adherence to the notion that domestic violence is overwhelmingly about female victims and male perpetrators. This is exemplified by the outcome of a recent family justice review, (Ministry of Justice, 2020). The final report, literature review and implementation plan resulting from this judicial review, amounting to some 406 pages, presents a perspective which is not so much biased as a monoculture of concern. The claim that partner abuse of men, and fathers in particular, is relatively uncommon is not supported by the fact that 72% of the charity's service users evidenced such abuse. Nor can any claim that the impact of such abuse on men is minor be sustained in the light of the present findings. 41% of service users subject to risk assessment were assessed in the "high risk" range, with a RIC score of 14 or higher (26% of the whole population in the study). But perhaps most revealing is that it is the domestic abuse risk which, out of the nine independent variables examined, is most strongly associated with loneliness, well-being and depression/suicidality. Add to these findings from this study the national crime survey findings that male domestic abuse victims are more likely to attempt suicide than female victims, (ONS, 2018b), and it ceases to be credible to argue that partner abuse is a less serious issue for men than women, either in terms of prevalence or impact.

Much has been written this year about increases in domestic abuse resulting from the Covid-19 lockdown. There has also been an immediate effect on non-resident parents' contact with their children. A survey conducted by the charity in April/May 2020 indicated that 61.5% of fathers responding to the survey had no contact, or only indirect contact, with their children during lockdown, a huge increase from 14% which prevailed prior to lockdown. In comparison, 27% of women responding to the survey had no contact, or only indirect contact, with their

children after lockdown, an increase from 9% prior to lockdown. The long-term effects of the lockdown remain to be seen, but it is already apparent that severe economic down-turn is likely. The potential for a simultaneous marked increase in both domestic abuse and unemployment, the two most significant variables, presents a worrying prognosis for increasing levels of isolation and suicidality among the demographic of separated fathers.

Conclusions

Separated fathers accessing the services of charity FNF Both Parents Matter Cymru were found to have,

- Substantially degraded mental well-being, 28% having a well-being score of 15 or lower, which has a prevalence of less than 2% in the general population.
- Highly elevated social and emotional isolation, 40% being severely lonely compared with 5% in the general adult population.
- Markedly elevated prevalence of suicidality.

Of nine independent variables investigated, the variable which had the dominant association with degraded well-being, elevated loneliness, and the increased prevalence of depression/suicidality was the fathers' victimisation by partner abuse. In each case the second most significant variable was an income less than £12,000 pa (generally due to being unemployed).

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Declaration of Interests

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