



## Advocacy After Fatal Domestic Abuse

A Centre of Excellence for reviews into fatal domestic abuse and for specialist peer support.

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### **New strangulation offence will save women's lives; Law Comes into Force on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> June 2022**

Advocacy After Fatal Domestic Abuse were central to the campaign to get amendments introduced in the House of Lords which changed the Domestic Abuse Act. This resulted in Strangulation and Suffocation becoming a specific offence and this comes into force on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> June 2022.

The charity AAFDA was set up by Frank Mullane MBE after his sister and nephew were murdered in domestic abuse. Frank has now become an expert on domestic violence and has advised hundreds of families who have lost relatives through murder and suicide following domestic violence.

Frank says 'When I read the history of someone killed by domestic violence, time and time again the warning signs of previous strangulations are there. The experience of other countries is that unless strangulation is identified as a specific offence the seriousness of it will be minimised by the criminal justice system as well as by those affected by it.' As a Home Office appointed reader of Domestic Homicide Reviews, he has read 1000 of these histories.

'It is horrific that an estimated 20,000<sup>1</sup> people in the UK are strangled each year yet perpetrators tend not to be charged, or if they are it is with a minor common assault charge

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<sup>1</sup> In the UK **37% of high-risk victims** who were clients of Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs) who had reported some physical abuse have experienced strangulation or attempted strangulation. This amounts to **20,000** victims in the UK whose cases had a MARAC (multi-agency risk assessment conference) where there was physical abuse between April 2019 – March 2020 (figures from the charity Safelives).

which doesn't reflect the seriousness of the offence. It is used as part of the coercion and control of women in domestic abuse, and it increases seven-fold<sup>2</sup> the risk of those being controlled to go on to be killed as well as having potential serious medical consequences. This new law will save lives.

'That is why, with our Patron, former MP Julia Drown, we campaigned for the change of the law. AAFDA held a meeting with members of the House of Lords to push for this. We co-ordinated a campaigning group including the Centre for Women's Justice, Stand Up To Domestic Abuse, Doctors, Survivors, Domestic Abuse workers and politicians which successfully persuaded the Government to introduce this specific offence.

'The new offence carries a sentence of up to 5 years in prison.

'Since then, we have been working with others to ensure the implementation of the new offence is a success and have set up a training event at the end of June to which more than 3000 staff across England and Wales have registered.'

Julia Drown said 'I was horrified when I learnt about the dangers of strangulation and how widespread it is. The potential long term medical and psychological consequences of being strangled include brain injury, stroke, and miscarriage<sup>3</sup>. Too many children witness these attacks and will be traumatised by them. Sometimes they too are victims of strangulation.

'Most people don't know that even fatal strangulations can leave no marks<sup>4</sup>. Yet it can take less pressure than opening a can of coke to strangle someone. So, this has to be taken seriously.

'Though these assaults mostly take place behind closed doors the fact that daily so many women's lives are threatened should not be hidden away. Having this new specific offence can help save people from the trauma of being coerced and controlled and ultimately will save lives. Staff working in this field are dedicated and overworked. Much more needs to be done to reduce the violence that women and girls experience but I hope this new offence will be one of many steps that will make a real difference.'

For more information contact

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<sup>2</sup> Glass et al (2008) 'Non-fatal strangulation is an important risk factor for homicide of women' *Journal of Emergency Medicine*

<sup>3</sup> Plattner T, Bollinger S., Zollinger U., *Forensic assessment of survived strangulation*. *Forensic Science International*. 2005 153 202-207

<sup>4</sup> McClane, Strack & Hawley (2001) *A review of 300 strangulation cases* Parts II and III