



**Let's see domestic violence
from a child's point of view**

NSPCC DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CAMPAIGN BRIEFING 2

2. Support services for children and families affected by domestic violence (England)¹

The NSPCC is calling on the UK Government and devolved administrations in Wales and Northern Ireland to see domestic violence from a child's point of view.

Every year, an estimated 750,000 children witness domestic violence¹. Although not every child is affected in the same way, this can cause serious emotional harm in both the short and long term. More worryingly, in families where there is domestic violence, children may also be physically and sexually abused. Researchers estimate that in 30-60% of domestic violence cases, the abusive partner is also abusing children in the family¹.

Children exposed to violence will react in different ways, and not every child who witnesses abuse will experience long-term difficulties. However **all children have the right to protection from violence and abuse and should have access to support.**

Summary of recommendations

- **The Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and local authorities should invest in preventive approaches - teaching about healthy relationships and domestic violence as a compulsory part of the Sex and Relationships curriculum, providing information about domestic violence in schools and education settings, providing and promoting listening services, and providing safe and healthy parenting programmes that are accessible to all and evaluate their effectiveness.**
- **The Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) should increase refuge provision and work with the DCSF to ensure dedicated support workers for children in all refuges.**
- **The DCSF, Department of Health (DoH), local authorities and Primary Care Trusts should ensure that children who have experienced domestic violence have access to counselling, specialist domestic violence programmes and therapeutic support.**
- **Specialist, culturally sensitive services and refuge accommodation should be made available in all areas to children and families from BME communities.**
- **Multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) should be prioritised locally, their roll out adequately resourced by the Home Office (HO) and representatives from local children's services and the Family Courts system should attend in all cases where there are children in the household. They should**

¹ This briefing covers England only. Please see our website www.nspcc.org.uk/dvcampaign for information about the campaign in Wales and NI

also work more closely with LSCBs. This should be supported by the Home Office.

- The Home Office should make sustainable funding available for independent domestic violence advocates (IDVAs) to meet the target of 1200 nationally. IDVAs support survivors by providing advice and information about the range, effectiveness and suitability of options to improve their safety and that of their children.
- The Home Office should increase resources for the provision of perpetrator programmes in all local areas.
- The DCSF and local authorities should make funding and resources available for a safe supervised contact centre in every area.

Introduction

*'Domestic violence is costly in its psychological, emotional, social and physical damage to women [...] This is all too apparent in records of key agencies throughout the country. It is even costlier to us as a society as a whole if we neglect the all too often hidden victims of domestic violence as well – the children.'*²

Children are often the hidden victims of domestic violence and it is essential that children who live with domestic violence are protected from harm and have access to the services they need to recover. Yet service provision for children is patchy, often does not adequately address children's needs and is severely under resourced. Effective service provision that prioritises the safety of both the child and the non-abusing parent in any area requires long-term commitment, planning and more sustainable funding strategies. The types of support services required are set out below.

Co-ordinated multi-agency responses at a local level

Responses to domestic violence should address the situation of all members of the family, provide support and protection for child and adult survivors, and challenge perpetrators. Particular effort is required to bring together services that respond to domestic violence with those ensuring the protection of children. This requires Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs), domestic violence forums, children's trusts, crime and disorder partnerships, local agencies and voluntary organisations to work together.

However, the level of multi-agency cooperation and responses varies across England. In some areas relationships between the statutory agencies and the voluntary sector are very poor and have resulted in separate networks developing to respond to the local need for domestic violence services. Joint work between agencies should focus on improving the range of services for children, increasing co-operation and co-ordination between services, improving practice by developing policy and practice guidelines, data gathering, increasing joint initial and ongoing training, and engagement in preventive work.

There is an urgent need for investment in community-based, accessible services for children and families affected by domestic violence. The Local Government Association's report *'Vision for services for children and young people affected by domestic violence'*³ sets out the services required in every local area across tiers of need, supported by staff training and clear referral processes:

- Tier 1 - All children/universal services: access to information in schools and youth settings; parenting support; helplines.

² Stanko, E, Crisp, D, Hale, C, Lucraft, H, Crime Concern, Hackney Safer Cities, and Children's Society, (1998) *Counting the costs: Estimating the Impact of Domestic Violence in the Borough of Hackney*, Centre for Criminal Justice Research, Brunel University, Uxbridge

³ Local Government Association et al. (2005) , *Vision for services for children and young people affected by domestic violence'*. London: Local Government Association

- Tier 2 - Vulnerable children: refuge support; advocacy; specialist domestic violence services.
- Tier 3 - Complex cases: counselling; therapeutic support.
- Tier 4 - Acute needs: Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs; child protection; work with the non-abusing parent, perpetrator programmes; family courts.

However, the reality is that many areas fall a long way short of providing this range of services.

- Universal and preventive services

The government response to domestic violence focuses disproportionately on the criminal justice response at the expense of effective prevention and early intervention. The vast costs to the UK economy of domestic violence between adults- £25.3bn in 2005-06 alone - demonstrate the scale of savings to be gained through adopting more preventive approaches.⁴ When the costs of services to children are included, these costs increase further. Prevention is likely to be worth the investment.

An explicit focus on prevention should include provision of information about domestic violence in youth settings, inclusion of teaching about healthy relationships as a compulsory part of the Sex and Relationships curriculum in schools⁵, programmes on safe and healthy parenting and information for parents about the impact of domestic violence on children in Children's Centres and other community settings, and local and national awareness raising campaigns. Access to helplines such as ChildLine and the National Domestic Violence Helpline is also important.

- Increased refuge provision, with dedicated child support workers

There are currently 450 women's refuges in the UK and in 2007, 17,406 women and 25,384 children stayed in refuge accommodation.⁶ Despite the evident need, one in three local authorities does not have a women's refuge⁷ and refuges often have to turn families away⁸. Findings of one London borough show that demand for beds in domestic violence refuges exceeds capacity by a factor of eight, using calculations based on the number of women seeking refuge,⁹ irrespective of the number of children seeking refuge with them. The government must urgently address this shortfall in available spaces.

With children making up roughly two thirds of the refuge population, children's services in refuges are an accessible and effective means of ensuring dedicated support for many of the children who have experienced the domestic violence. At present, there are no permanent statutory funded services for children operating within refuges that address this need and many refuges are not sufficiently resourced to provide a dedicated children's worker.¹⁰ The negative impact of domestic violence on children can only be reversed if they have access to immediate, specialist and child-focused support services that are tailored to meet the individual needs of the child.

*'The absent services for those [children] caught up with their mothers' need to flee violence by moving out of the home, are an obvious gap in public service provision.'*¹¹

⁴ Home Affairs Select Committee Report (2008), *Domestic Violence, Forced Marriage and 'Honour'-based Violence House of Commons*

⁵ The government recently announced that PSHE would be made a statutory subject. See Briefing 3 for more details.

⁶ Home Affairs Select Committee Report (2008), *Domestic Violence, Forced Marriage and 'Honour'-based Violence House of Commons*

⁷ *ibid*

⁸ Women's Resource Centre. (2007) *Funding to London Women's Refuges: Report to London Councils*

⁹ Stanko, E, Crisp, D, Hale, C, Lucreft, H, Crime Concern, Hackney Safer Cities, and Children's Society, (1998) *Counting the costs: Estimating the Impact of Domestic Violence in the Borough of Hackney*, Centre for Criminal Justice Research, Brunel University, Uxbridge

¹⁰ Women's Aid (2004) *One year on: The status of children's services in refuge organisations since the implementation of National Standards for Under 8s Day Care*

¹¹ Stanko, E, Crisp, D, Hale, C, Lucreft, H, Crime Concern, Hackney Safer Cities, and Children's Society, (1998) *Counting the costs: Estimating the Impact of Domestic Violence in the Borough of Hackney*, Centre for Criminal Justice Research, Brunel University, Uxbridge

The NSPCC consider that the government and local authorities should increase refuge provision and ensure there is a dedicated support worker for children in all refuges.

- Therapeutic support groups, counselling and specialist domestic violence services

Children who have experienced domestic violence may suffer from a range of long-term physical and psychological affects that can be overcome through counselling, therapeutic and specialist support.¹² Through individual or group work, children can be assisted to make sense of any unresolved trauma and learn ways to stay safe and build non-violent relationships. Such services should also work with non-abusing parents to build their capacity to help their children to understand and come to terms with the abuse they have suffered; importantly, they also enable them to regain confidence to resume their role as a parent.

However, there is a shortage of specialist projects for children across the UK, and this is especially the case in rural areas.¹³ The quality and availability of services at local level is extremely varied and is mostly delivered by voluntary sector organisations.¹⁴ The voluntary sector faces growing financial pressures, and typically relies upon insecure, short-term funding¹⁵ and can not be expected to provide services to all children affected by domestic violence. It is imperative that these services have sustainable funding from local and national government.

The NSPCC considers that every child who has been harmed by witnessing or experiencing domestic violence should be assessed and where necessary receive, specialist, child focused therapeutic or counselling support to overcome the damaging emotional and psychological effects of experiencing living with violence. Not every child would need intensive therapeutic support or counselling. The cost per child of providing the NSPCC's therapeutic work, including assessment costs, ranges from £3,250 to £7,620.¹⁶

- Specialist services for black and minority ethnic children and families¹⁷

Only 15 of the 150 local authority areas have specialist services for BME women and children.¹⁸ – Women and children in BME communities are less likely to access statutory services for a host of reasons including barriers at both the cultural and institutional level.¹⁹ **Specialist services and refuges should be available for children from these communities that include culturally appropriate individual work, group work and work with mothers.** (See associated briefing on South Asian and BME communities)

- Multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARACs)

Multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) focus on high-risk cases and involve key agencies (e.g. police, probation, education, children's services, adults services, health, housing, IDVAs and the voluntary sector) working together on an individual victim's case to share information. This is used to build up a comprehensive picture of the abuse and agree action to best

¹² Institute of Psychiatry [DN: to complete]

¹³ Stalford et al (2003) *Children and Domestic Violence in Rural Areas: a Child-Focused Assessment of Service Provision*, Save the Children, London

¹⁴ Humphreys et al, (2000) *From Good Intentions to Good Practice : mapping services working with Families where there is domestic violence*. Bristol: Policy Press.

¹⁵ Coy et al, (2007) *Map of Gaps: The Postcode Lottery of Violence against Women Support Services*. End Violence against women and Equality and Human Rights Commission. Also see Humphreys et al, (2000) *From Good Intentions to Good Practice : mapping services working with Families where there is domestic violence*. Bristol: Policy Press.

¹⁶ Tier 2 services (secondary level services provided by specialist staff) are typically required for a period of up to six months, during which time a child will be helped to full recovery. The cost of this service, including assessment costs, is approximately £3,250 per child. Tier 3 services are provided for children with more complex needs, and include disabled children or children who have experienced severe trauma. The complexity of their needs requires a more sustained period of intervention. The cost of these services, including assessment costs, is approximately £7,620 per child. The costs provided below assume an average cost per child of £5,435.

¹⁷ See briefing 5 on Domestic violence responses for children from black and minority ethnic communities

¹⁸ Coy et al, (2007) *Map of Gaps: The Postcode Lottery of Violence against Women Support Services*. End Violence against women and Equality and Human Rights Commission

¹⁹ Izzidien S. (2008) *'I can't tell people what is happening at home' Domestic abuse within South Asian communities: The specific needs of women children and young people*. NSPCC: London

support and protect a domestic violence victim and their family. MARACs are in the process of being rolled out across England and Wales and in September 2008 they covered 17,500 high risk cases involving almost 25,000 children.

Evaluations of MARACs have shown that the agencies involved view them as invaluable for ensuring that they assist victims more efficiently. In addition, they consistently identify children who may be unknown to the authorities but who are at risk of harm as they live with high risk domestic abuse. However, membership of MARACs places a significant demand on agencies and many MARACs find it difficult to cope with the number and complexity of cases referred to them. Additional resources are needed so that victims are effectively responded to and the work of MARACs needs to be given greater priority at a local level.

It is imperative that representatives from children's services and the Family Courts system are fully supportive of MARACs and attend and contribute to meetings for all MARAC cases involving children. There are some examples of excellent practice e.g. where all cases that go to MARACs with children under the age of 2 automatically get free additional childcare and children's services are fully engaged in MARAC meetings. However it is not the same everywhere, in some places there is inconsistent attendance and research is not always completed before the meeting. In others children's services can appear reluctant to take referrals from MARACs. **Further work also needs to be undertaken to strengthen LSCB involvement in MARAC activities to safeguard children.**

- Independent domestic violence advocates

The role of independent domestic violence advocates (IDVAs) is to support survivors of domestic violence and their children and to work with other agencies to ensure their safety. They fulfil a crucial function in supporting and empowering victims. They may provide support for obtaining civil injunctions to protect the individuals affected, improving home security for children or alerting schools and services to the risks that children face.

However, IDVAs are a hugely overstretched resource, with 300 referrals per practitioner each year and each advocate on average managing 150 cases. **We recommend that the Government increases the rate of its funding for IDVA services to meet the target of 1200 IDVAs nationally, set by Co-ordinated Action for Domestic Abuse (CAADA).**²⁰ **The needs of children in households where there is domestic violence should also be considered by IDVAs.**

- Perpetrator programmes which meet minimum standards²¹

In order to help protect current and potential future victims, work to tackle domestic violence needs to include a focus on addressing the violent and abusive behaviour of those who perpetrate it.

Perpetrators of domestic violence need to learn new, appropriate responses to feelings of jealousy and aggression. There are currently very few avenues of practical support - especially for those perpetrators who recognise they have a problem and would like to change their behaviour or programmes or to challenge violent behaviour before it becomes entrenched. (See briefing on perpetrators).

Additional resources must be made available for appropriate prevention and intervention strategies that directly target domestic violence perpetrators, whether or not they have been convicted of an offence. These aim to help them stop their offending and contribute to promoting the safety of children and young people living in homes where there is domestic violence.

²⁰ Home Affairs Select Committee Report (2008), *Domestic Violence, Forced Marriage and 'Honour'-based Violence* House of Commons

²¹ See separate note on perpetrator programmes

The Ministry of Justice and Home Office should adequately resource the provision of innovative perpetrator programmes which meet the standards promoted by the National Respect Network and build on findings from research with perpetrators. A central feature of these projects is that they must be developed alongside support services for the women and children and work also to ensure their safety.²²

- A supervised contact centre

The NSPCC supports the principle of children maintaining contact with both parents after separation, providing that it is safe to do so. The child's welfare is the single most important factor for courts and every court should be guided by what will be best for the child. **The DCSF and local authorities should make funding and resources available for a safe supervised contact centre in every area.**

NSPCC PETITION

The NSPCC is calling for the UK Government and devolved administrations in Wales and Northern Ireland to tackle domestic violence from a child's point of view.

We want to see:

- Adequate support services for children and families affected, so that when they are brave enough to speak out, they be safe and supported. (Current government funded provision is not enough)
- Training for professionals to identify children living with domestic violence so that whenever adults are working with domestic violence, they think about the children affected.
- Education about domestic violence in schools and other youth settings so all children learn that the violence is not their fault, and how to stay safe.

To support this campaign, please visit www.nspcc.org.uk/dvcampaign

HELPLINE NUMBERS

ChildLine: If you are a child or young person, for confidential advice and support from someone you can trust, call 0800 1111 or go to childline.org.uk

NSPCC helpline: If you have concerns about the safety of a child please call the NSPCC Helpline on 0808 800 5000. It is free, confidential, and our advisors are there to help 24 hours a day.

National domestic violence helpline: Domestic violence can happen to anyone. If you or someone you know is affected you can contact: 0808 2000 247 – this is the Freephone 24 Hour National Domestic Violence Helpline, run in partnership between Women's Aid and Refuge.

Contact information

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