

# The Improvement Service

ELECTED MEMBER BRIEFING NOTE

# Preventing and Eradicating Domestic Abuse



# What is the purpose of the Briefing Note series?

The IS has developed an Elected Members Briefing Series to help elected members keep abreast with key issues affecting local government.

Some Briefing Notes will be directly produced by IS staff but we will also publish material from as wide a range of public bodies, commentators and observers of public services as possible.

We will use the IS website and Elected Member e-Bulletin to publicise and provide access to the Briefing Notes. All Briefing Notes in the series can be accessed at [www.improvementservice.org.uk/elected-members-briefing-notes.html](http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/elected-members-briefing-notes.html)

## About this Briefing Note

This briefing is one in a series of elected member briefings raising awareness of the different forms of violence against women and highlighting some of the good practice around Scotland. It has been produced in partnership with Scottish Women's Aid and the National Violence Against Women Network.

# What is the issue?

*“We have always been clear that there is no place for domestic abuse in Scotland, and tackling it is a top priority for the Scottish Government.”*

Alex Neil, Health Secretary, October 2015

Domestic abuse is persistent and controlling behaviour by a partner or ex-partner which causes physical, sexual and/or emotional harm. It is common but often concealed. In most cases, it is experienced by women and children and is perpetrated by men.<sup>1</sup> According to the Council of Europe, between one in three and one in five women will experience domestic abuse in the course of her lifetime.

It is hard to establish the exact scale of the problem, but police figures gives us some indication of the extent of the issue in Scottish society today. There were 60,080 incidents of domestic abuse recorded by the police in Scotland in 2012-13. Eighty percent of these involved a female victim and male perpetrator. There were 11 domestic homicides recorded during this period.<sup>2</sup> These figures relate only to incidents reported to the police and a recent study by the Equality and Human Rights Commission highlights that much domestic abuse is never reported, and under-reporting is a particular issue in women from religious and ethnic minority communities. In light of this, it is fair to say that domestic abuse remains a very significant and large scale social problem in Scotland.

Domestic abuse is not an isolated incident, not a ‘one off’, nor is it a fight or an argument between two people who are equal in a relationship. Rather it is a pattern of surveillance and domination by one partner over the other, where fear is not just a by-product but a central tactic used by the perpetrator. Within this pattern of behaviour, physical violence can be non-existent, regular and ‘low level’ or serious and sustained. Women also often experience high levels of sexual violence and financial control. Women (and their children) are sometimes killed by a partner or ex-partner, with the point of leaving the perpetrator being a particularly vulnerable time.

The phrase ‘coercive control’ is often used instead of domestic abuse as lots of experts feel this better encapsulates the problem. It was a concept first described by Professor Evan Stark.<sup>3</sup> He argues that coercive control is a process whereby the perpetrator entraps his partner. In this model, physical violence is used (or not) alongside a range of other tactics – isolation, degradation, mind-games, and the microregulation of everyday life (monitoring phone calls, dress, food consumption, social activity etc). The perpetrator creates a world in which the victim is constantly monitored and criticised; every move is checked against an unpredictable, ever-changing, unknowable ‘rule-book’. Surveillance continues even when the perpetrator is not present (constant phone calls or texts, using children to report on movement etc). The perpetrator can come to appear omnipotent. Experiencing coercive control is like being taken hostage; the victim becomes captive in a real/unreal world created by the perpetrator, entrapped in a world of confusion, contradiction and fear. Indeed, based on her interviews with survivors of domestic abuse, Professor Rachel Pain has described their experiences as ‘everyday terrorism’.<sup>4</sup>



*“We were trying to escape violence off my dad, he was quite an abusive partner for my mum and quite an abusive parent to his children... That’s what I remember, constantly being afraid. I wasn’t allowed to even be affectionate to my mum because that meant that, you know, you could be the next target and that’s a really scary and horrible thing for a child to have to go through...”*

David was 8 years old when he and his family entered a Women’s Aid refuge. To see a fuller filmed interview with him, visit the Scottish Women’s Aid website - [www.scottishwomensaid.org](http://www.scottishwomensaid.org)

In 2000, the then Scottish Executive published its *National Strategy to Address Domestic Abuse in Scotland* and it remains a policy priority to this day. The strategy defined domestic abuse as:

Domestic abuse (as gender-based abuse) can be perpetrated by partners or ex-partners and can include physical abuse (assault and physical attack involving a range of behaviour), sexual abuse (acts which degrade and humiliate women and are perpetrated against their will, including rape) and mental and emotional abuse (such as threats, verbal abuse, racial abuse, withholding money and other types of controlling behaviour such as isolation from family and friends).

The definition recognises the statistical fact that women are most frequently victimised by this form of abuse. It also seeks to acknowledge the wide range of tactics used by perpetrators of such abuse. The strategy also acknowledged that in some communities wider family members become involved in the abuse, that domestic abuse occurs in same sex relationships and that children who live with abuse of a parent or carer (even if they are not physically assaulted themselves) are themselves experiencing abuse.

# Why does domestic abuse matter?

Domestic abuse matters because it has a devastating impact on the lives of those targeted and affects the wider family and community.

The impacts of domestic abuse are wide-ranging. Domestic abuse affects health including mental health, safety, prevents women and children being able to stay in their own home, limits their education and work opportunities – in short, there is no area of life into which domestic abuse doesn't intrude. It also has an impact on the wider community through the need for services to intervene; for example Police Scotland receive a domestic incident related phone call every ten minutes.

The Scottish Government estimates that the cost of domestic abuse to the public purse is £2.3 billion.<sup>5</sup> It is widely accepted that this is a conservative estimate given the amount of under-reporting of domestic abuse and the consequent difficulty in ascertaining exact numbers. The cost of dealing with a murder, of which there were 11 domestic-related offences recorded by Scottish Police in 2012/13, is £170,097.<sup>6</sup> This is a significant issue for elected members whose responsibilities include fiscal considerations in terms of service provision.

Domestic abuse can have a devastating and long-term impact on the lives of those affected. It can result in homelessness, isolation, loss of earnings, physical and mental health problems, injuries and even death. In a study by Shelter, 40% of all homeless women stated that domestic violence was a contributor to their homelessness.<sup>7</sup> Domestic violence was found to be the single most quoted reason for becoming homeless. Common health effects of domestic abuse include physical injury, poor health and a range of psychological and reproductive difficulties. Domestic abuse has a damaging impact on mental health with problems such as anxiety, depression and low self esteem being well documented in research. All this, quite obviously, has consequences for local services; housing, health, policing, social services and the voluntary sector (often funded by local government).



*“I went out, in the whole time I was with him, three times, it was constant phone calls, texts, find out where I am, who I’m talking to, so there wasn’t really any point in going out because it was just constant, you know, checking up on me. I lost quite a few friends because of that, because it wasn’t worth me meeting them for the hassle, you know. It meant I was isolated, I totally lost all my confidence, I stopped going out, I was in the house all the time just where he wanted me.”*

Maria – to see a fuller filmed interview with her, visit the Scottish Women’s Aid website - [www.scottishwomensaid.org](http://www.scottishwomensaid.org)

Domestic abuse matters because it also has a huge impact on children and young people. Research shows that even if they are not being physically harmed, the psychological impact of living with fear is severe. Children in violent homes face three risks: the risk of observing traumatic events, the risk of being abused themselves, and the risk of being neglected. Research consistently shows that children living with domestic abuse have higher rates of depression, trauma symptoms, and behavioural/cognitive problems than other children. Evidence suggests that witnessing domestic abuse may be as harmful to children as suffering physical abuse and that there is a co-occurrence of domestic abuse and child abuse in 40% of cases. Domestic abuse is a contributory factor in half of all serious case reviews and is a factor in 75% of cases on the child protection register.<sup>8</sup> Because domestic abuse can continue post separation, contact between a perpetrator and child can be unsafe. Indeed, 29 children in 13 families were killed on contact visits over a ten year period in England and Wales. As a result of this evidence base, the national guidelines on child protection state that harm is done to a child if they witness violence and/or abuse against their parent/carer. Concern for child welfare and child protection is obviously key for elected members who have responsibility for ensuring that robust procedures and adequate service provision is available locally.

There is therefore a social, moral and economic case for elected members to act.

# What is the challenge/issue for elected members?

Domestic abuse is an issue for elected members in four main ways:

1. It costs the public purse a large amount to tackle it. But the cost of domestic abuse is more than simply the cost of service provision; it has knock on economic and social costs of importance to elected members
2. It devastates the lives and relationships of individuals in the community you are mandated to represent. Furthermore, it impacts on the very fabric of your community.
3. Elected members have a key role in setting strategic direction locally and therefore are central to decision making that impacts on work to address domestic abuse.
4. Elected members have statutory responsibilities under Human Rights legislation and the Equality Act 2010 to address the issue (see final section for links to relevant legislative and policy documents).

As the Scottish Government acknowledged in its Equality Statement 2009 (attached to the Draft Budget), “It is not in Scotland’s economic or social interests for women and children to experience violence and domestic abuse.” Elected members have an important role to play in promoting the economic and social wellbeing of their constituency.

The Scottish Women’s Budget Group have highlighted that the cost of domestic abuse goes beyond the costs of service provision and could be summed up in the following way:

- Direct costs - including medical services, criminal justice costs, housing and social services costs.
- Indirect costs - including the cost of suffering which can lead to mental health issues, drug or alcohol issues etc.
- Economic multiplier costs - including a decrease in labour market participation and a loss of productivity due to absenteeism.
- Social multiplier effects - including the impact on children.

The third of these points highlights the way that domestic abuse can be a problem for productivity and business; it does not stay at home but impacts on the work of the victim with all the resultant implications for the workplace and the wider economy. All four of these directly relate to elected members as they are responsible to their electorate as representatives of a particular ward area, decision makers for the whole council area, policy makers for future activities of the council, scrutinisers of the work of the council, regulators of planning, licensing and other matters required by government and as community leaders.

It is essential that future funding decisions at a local level take into account the cost-benefits to all the public services involved. Community Planning partners need to recognise the shared benefits, joint planning and commitment required to ensure there is adequate provision of specialist domestic abuse services in every area of Scotland. Research has found that where women and children are able to access the safety and support that they need, they are less likely to require as many, or as lengthy, interventions from other agencies such as the police, social services and health. A number of studies carried out in England, Wales and, more recently, in Scotland, analysed the costs and benefits of the Supporting People (SP) programmes, which were the main funding stream for a range of housing support services provided to different client groups. These studies repeatedly found that support services provided to women fleeing domestic abuse had one of the largest impacts in terms of saving money to other services, notably the health service, local authority housing departments and the police. A study commissioned by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister analysed the benefits of housing-related support in terms of reduced public spending for different client groups. The research found that support provided to women fleeing domestic violence provided financial benefits that were almost double the cost of the services. The cost-benefit for this group in reducing public spending is £110 million, or £19,000 per individual woman, twice the level of the cost of providing support. This does not take into account the individual benefit to the women and children in reduction of fear, physical harm and mental suffering. The research found that when women threatened by domestic violence were able to access support services and leave an abusive partner, the risk of further assaults was reduced by 80%.

It is vital then that elected members consider the provision of domestic abuse-related services in their area.



# What does ‘good practice’ look like in this area?

Key issues that elected members should consider in relation to good practice and domestic abuse fall into the following areas.

## Strategic approach

At a strategic level local authorities and their Community Planning Partners have a key role to play in the delivery of Equally Safe, Scotland’s strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls published by the Scottish Government and COSLA. Equally Safe focuses on prevention at a national and local level, outlines a framework for implementation and sets out how this work links to the National Performance Framework.

This strategic approach should be reflected in local authority Single Outcome Agreements and in the Equality Outcomes set under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). The PSED requires that public authorities consider equality in their day to day work in developing policy, delivering services and in their role as an employer. As Equally Safe sets out, the need to address gender inequality is key to the prevention of domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women.

A multi-agency approach is recognised as vital to preventing domestic abuse, protecting women and children and ensuring the provision of appropriate services. Multi-agency Violence Against Women Partnerships have a key role to play in this strategic approach. Guidance has been produced by the Scottish Government on multi-agency working on this issue. Elected members have a key role to play in ensuring the delivery of a coherent and integrated strategic response to address this issue.

## Specialist services

Specialist domestic abuse services are an essential resource for a local community and elected members have a leadership role in ensuring that adequate specialist provision is available. ‘Specialist’ services here mean those services whose primary function is to support and advocate for victims/survivors of domestic abuse, including children, or which work with perpetrators to manage risk, hold them accountable and change behaviours. These services work holistically and understand that a range of practical and emotional support is necessary.

Within the third sector, Women’s Aid groups have been at the forefront of this specialist provision, providing a range of services: refuge accommodation, advocacy, emotional and practical support for women, children and young people. Other third sector projects such as the LGBT Domestic Abuse Project work to ensure that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people experiencing domestic abuse are supported, while the Men’s Advice Line provides services for men affected by domestic abuse.

Specialist services also occur within the statutory sector and work closely with the third sector. An

example of this is West Lothian Council's Domestic And Sexual Abuse Team which provides telephone and outreach support to victims/survivors. Another is ASSIST which aims to ensure that victims/survivors are safe, informed and supported throughout their involvement with the court process. The Caledonian System operates in several parts of Scotland and is an integrated approach to address domestic abuse which works with men convicted of domestic abuse related offences while offering support to their partners and children.

Specialist services also work through a multi-agency approach, with CEDAR an example of this. CEDAR is a group work programme for children and their mothers which provides an opportunity to explore feelings with an emphasis on fun and creative activities that keep children engaged and interacting with each other. It is facilitated by professionals from a range of roles and is about creating a safe place for children and their mothers to help each other to find the best strategies to deal with their experiences and rebuild their lives. A key aim of the programme is to help mothers to support their children in their recovery.

Good practice suggests that elected members should be aware of what specialist services are available in their area, identify gaps in that provision and work to ensure these gaps are closed.

### Generic services

The prevalence of domestic abuse means that staff in mainstream services focusing on housing, education, social work and health within the statutory and third sector will have contact with those experiencing domestic abuse. It is therefore vital that elected members provide leadership in shaping services responses within mainstream service providers.

In order to ensure people affected by domestic abuse are supported appropriately, it is vital that front-line staff in generic mainstream services understand the issues and are able to respond to victim/survivors empathetically. While this does not necessarily mean providing in-depth support, it does mean being alert to the indicators of domestic abuse, asking about it when safe to do so, listening, being alert to child protection implications of a disclosure, responding effectively in line with their job role and referring on to support services, when appropriate. This means that all staff should have received some level of training about domestic abuse and that up-to-date information about specialist support services is made available to them.

It is also necessary for these services to understand that they will also be working with perpetrators of domestic abuse and need to assess the level of risk posed by them. It is considered good practice that every organisation has a protocol and pathway that staff can follow when they are working with someone they believe has experienced/or who has disclosed domestic abuse. This will enable staff to see domestic abuse as their core business and understand their role within the range of services which might be needed by the victim/survivor, including children. Elected members can take a lead in this area by ensuring that policies, procedures and training are in place and accessible for staff. They can also ensure, when commissioning services from the third sector, that such policies, procedures and training are part of the terms of grant.

Taking this holistic and strategic approach will create a robust foundation for safe and effective working on the issue and will guide and enable elected members to promote good practice in the prevention of domestic abuse and in the delivery of effective and appropriate responses to victims of domestic abuse.

# Key messages and learning points for elected members

- Domestic abuse is a major social impact which negatively affects individuals and communities. It disproportionately affects women and children and has consequences that range from disrupted schooling, to homelessness to severe health consequences.
- There is a major economic cost (£2.3 billion) associated with domestic abuse. This represents the need to respond to domestic abuse by a range of services such as the police, health sector, housing, education and social services. There is also a cost in loss of productivity and income generation in business.
- Elected members have responsibilities and a key role to play in ensuring that there are effective services and interventions to address this issue within their constituency and local authority.

# Further support and contacts

There is a multi-agency VAW partnership tackling violence against women in every local authority area in Scotland. You can find out more by contacting your local VAW Partnership.

Look out for further briefings about the different forms of violence against women.

**Scottish Women's Aid** - [www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk](http://www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk)

The national domestic abuse charity and umbrella body organisation for a network of Women's Aid groups (providers of a range of support services for women, children and young people experiencing domestic abuse).

**LGBT Domestic Abuse Project** - [www.lgbtdomesticabuse.org.uk](http://www.lgbtdomesticabuse.org.uk)

Scotland's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender domestic abuse project providing training, information and policy guidance.

**Respect and the Men's Advice Line** - [www.respect.uk.net](http://www.respect.uk.net)

Funded by the Scottish Government to provide support to men affected by domestic abuse. Also does work with perpetrators of domestic abuse.

**Equally Safe: Scotland's strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls** - <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0049/00498256.pdf>

**Violence Against Women Multi-agency Partnerships** - [www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/299742/0093439.pdf](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/299742/0093439.pdf)

For information and guidance on the role of multi-agency partnerships.

**Public Sector Equality Duty** - [www.equalityhumanrights.com/private-and-public-sector-guidance/public-sector-providers/public-sector-equality-duty](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/private-and-public-sector-guidance/public-sector-providers/public-sector-equality-duty)

# Notes

1. For discussions about women's and men's experiences of domestic abuse see McFeely, C., Whiting, N., Lombard, N., Brooks, O. Burman, M., and McGowan, M. (2013) 'Domestic Abuse and Gender Inequality: An Overview of the current debate' Centre for Families and Relationships, University of Edinburgh Briefing 69 <http://www.crfr.ac.uk/assets/briefing-69.pdf> Dobash, RP. & Dobash, RE. (2004) 'Women's Violence to Men in Intimate Relationships: Working on a Puzzle' *British Journal of Criminology* 44(3): 324-49. Gadd, D. Farrall, S., Dallimore, D. & Lombard, N. (2002) Domestic Abuse Against Men in Scotland, Scottish Executive Central Research Unit: Edinburgh Hester, M. (2009) *Who does what to whom?: Gender and domestic violence perpetrators*. Bristol: University of Bristol in association with the Northern Rock Foundation. Johnson, M. P. 2000 *Conflict and Control: Gender Symmetry and Asymmetry in Domestic Violence* Arlington, Virginia: National Institute of Justice Gender Symmetry Workshop. Kimmel, M. S. 2002 "Gender Symmetry" in Domestic Violence: A Substantive and Methodological Research Review. *Violence Against Women* Vol. 8 No.11 pp 1332-1363 Respect. (2010) *Respect practice guidance: Values, purposes and methods of identifying who is doing what to whom in intimate partner violence (IPV)*. For information about lgbt people's experiences of domestic abuse see Donovan, Catherine and Hester, Marianne (2010) 'I hate the word victim: an exploration of recognition of domestic violence in same sex relationships' *Social Policy and Society*, 9 (2). pp. 279-289. Morton, J. & Roch, A., *Out of Sight, Out of Mind?: Transgender People's Experiences of Domestic Abuse*. (LGBTYS & Equality Network: 2010) Whiting, N (2008) 'What Can Contemporary Gender Theory Contribute to An Understanding of Abuse in Same Sex Relationships?' *Scottish Journal of Criminal Justice Studies*
2. *Scottish Government Statistical Bulletin (Crime & Justice Series)*
3. Stark, E. *Coercive Control: How Men Entrap Women in Personal Life*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
4. Pain, R. *Everyday Terrorism: How Fear Works in Domestic Abuse*. (Durham: University of Durham, 2012).
5. The Scottish Government, *Safer Lives, Changed Lives: A Shared Approach to Tackling Violence Against Women in Scotland*. (Edinburgh: The Scottish Government, 2009).
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7. Cramer, H. with Carter, M. (2002) *Homelessness: What's Gender Got to Do With It?* (London: Shelter)

8. Department of Health, (2003) 'Into the Mainstream'. For further information about children's experiences of domestic abuse see Bowker L.H, Arbitell M, and McFerron (1988) On the Relationship between Wife-Beating and Child Abuse, in Yllo K and Bograd M (eds) *Feminist Perspectives on Wife Abuse*. London, Sage. Harne, L. *Violent Fathering and the Risks to Children: The Need for Change* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2011) Hester M and Pearson C (1998) *From Periphery to Centre: Domestic Violence in Work with Abused Children*, Bristol, The Policy Press. Mackay, Kirsteen (2013) . Commissioned briefing paper. Scottish Commissioner for Children and Young People. Available at: <http://www.sccyp.org.uk/ufiles/views-of-children-and-domestic-abuse.pdf> Morrison, F. Wasoff, F. (2012) 'Child contact centres and domestic abuse - victim safety and the challenge to neutrality'. *Violence Against Women*, Special Issue on Transdisciplinarity. 18(6): 711:720

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