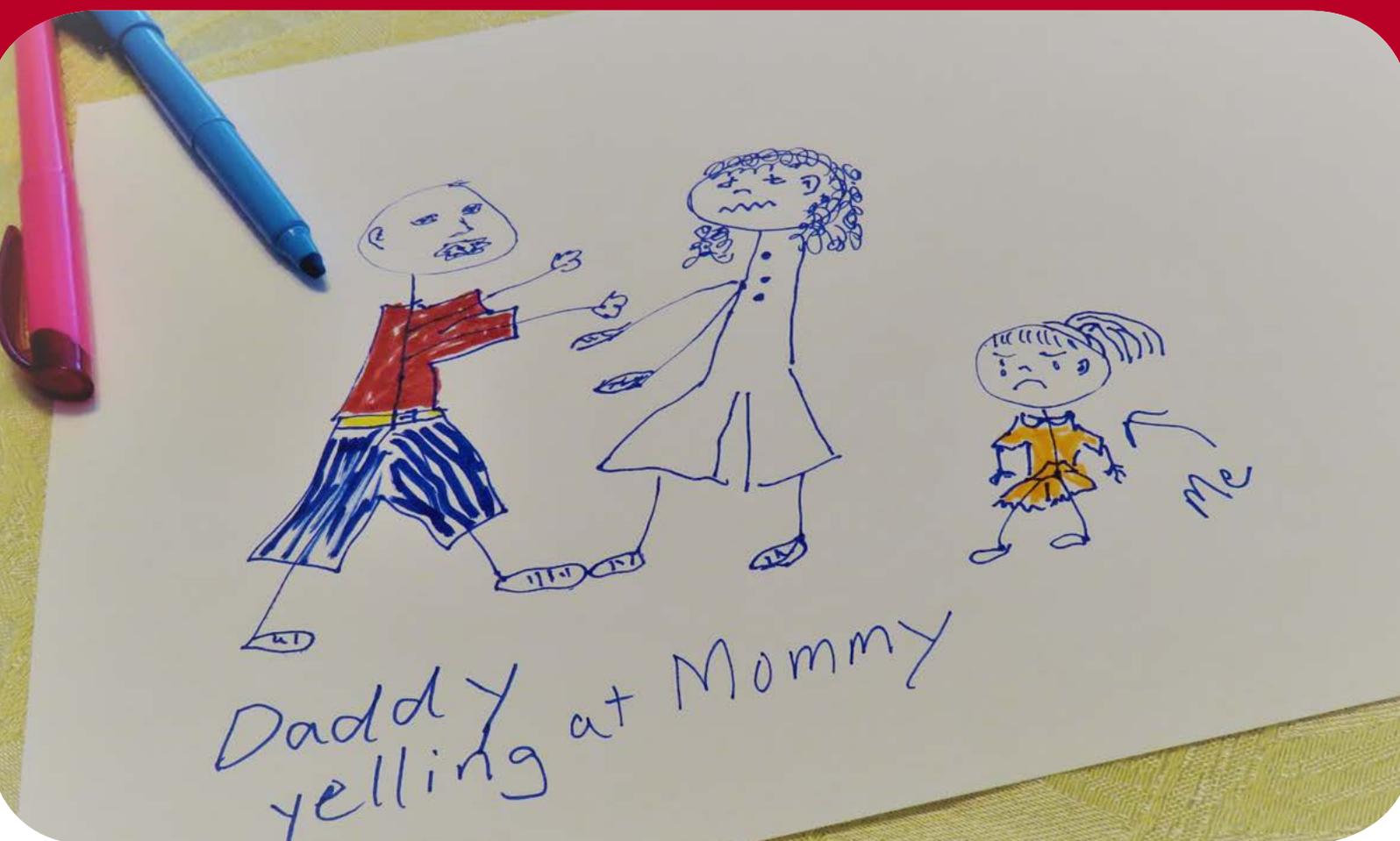


ELECTED MEMBER BRIEFING NOTE

Children, young people and domestic abuse: impact, support and recovery



What is the purpose of the briefing note series?

The Improvement Service (IS) has developed an Elected Members Briefing Series to help elected members keep pace with key issues affecting local government.

Some briefing notes will be directly produced by IS staff but we will also make available 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-member-guidance-and-briefings.html

About this briefing note

This briefing is part of a series raising awareness of the causes and consequences of violence against women and girls (VAWG) and highlighting good practice across Scotland in tackling this issue.

The briefing aims to raise awareness of how children and young people are affected by domestic abuse, highlight specialist services available in Scotland to support children affected by domestic abuse and suggest how elected members can provide support in improving outcomes for children.¹

Scotland uses a gendered analysis to understand VAWG. This helps demonstrate the scale and impact of violence and abuse, and highlights that gender-based violence is a cause and consequence of gender inequality. While men may experience violence and abuse, prevalence statistics show that women and girls are disproportionately affected by various forms of VAWG, including domestic abuse; around four out of every five incidents of domestic abuse recorded by the Police in Scotland in 2017-18 had a female victim and male perpetrator.² Women and girls are also more likely to be subjected to patterns of control, as well as repeated and severe forms of abuse.³

- 1 For more information on tackling and eradicating domestic abuse and what elected members can do, please see Improvement Service, Scottish Women's Aid and National Violence Against Women Network (2015) *Preventing and eradicating domestic abuse, Elected Member briefing note*, available at http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/documents/em_briefing_notes/EM-Briefing-domestic-abuse.pdf
- 2 Scottish Government (2018), *Domestic abuse in Scotland: 2017-18 statistics*, available at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/domestic-abuse-recorded-police-scotland-2017-18/>
- 3 For more information on a gendered analysis of violence against women, see Improvement Service and COSLA (2018), *Why adopt a gendered analysis of violence and abuse Elected Member briefing note*, available at http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/documents/em_briefing_notes/em-briefing-gendered-analysis-vawg.pdf



Domestic abuse costs the Scottish public purse **£2.3 billion** a year

It is estimated that over **100,000** children in Scotland experience domestic abuse



In 2017/18, Police Scotland recorded

59,541

incidents of domestic abuse



One study found co-occurrence of domestic abuse and child abuse in

40% of cases



40%

of those suffering any form of partner abuse said that children were living in the household during the most recent incident

For **62%** of these cases, the children were present or nearby at the time of the most recent incident



What is the issue and why does it matter?

It is estimated that over 100,000 children in Scotland experience domestic abuse.⁴ Domestic abuse is under-reported and often remains a “hidden crime”, meaning these figures are likely to be much higher.

The Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act came into effect on 1st April 2019 and defines domestic abuse as a course of behaviour that is abusive towards a partner or ex-partner. The Act extends the legal definition of domestic abuse beyond physical violence to include coercive control and psychological and emotional abuse.⁵

Crucially, the Act recognises the impact of domestic abuse on children, with the Bill’s aggravator allowing courts to pass more severe sentences for a perpetrator if: he has been abusive towards his ex/partner when a child can see or hear what is happening; the perpetrator directs behaviour at a child as part of the abuse or makes use of a child in carrying out the abuse; and if a reasonable person would consider the course of behaviour, or an incident of behaviour that forms part of the course of behaviour, to be likely to adversely affect a child usually residing with either/both the victim and perpetrator.

This responds to evidence that shows how a child can be affected by the perpetrator’s control of their mother. Research shows that “children may be harmed by non-physical abusive behaviours inherent to coercive control-based domestic violence, including continual monitoring, isolation and verbal/emotional/psychological and financial abuses”. For instance, one study found that children’s “freedom to say and do things” was “narrowed by perpetrators’/fathers’ coercive control”.⁶ Perpetrators also often aim to undermine the relationship between mother and child (by monopolising the mother’s time, for example), with the damage potentially causing long-term emotional strain or a complete breakdown of the relationship.

Experiencing domestic abuse can affect all areas of children’s lives, including health, education, development and relationships. This can have devastating short- and long-term effects on their wellbeing and life chances. Research shows the effects of domestic abuse are physical, social, emotional and behavioural. Children may exhibit physical symptoms associated with trauma and stress, sustain injuries when defending a parent or sibling if there is physical violence or, in the most

4 Scottish Executive (2004), *Children and young people experiencing domestic abuse: guidance note for planners*, available at <https://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20180518074935/http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2004/10/20122/45536>

5 For more on the new Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act, see <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2018/5/contents/enacted>

6 E. Katz (2016), “Beyond the physical incident model: how children living with domestic violence are harmed by and resist regimes of coercive control”, *Child Abuse Review*, vol. 25, 46-59.

extreme, be injured or killed by a perpetrator.⁷ They may also experience intense feelings of fear and anxiety, low self-esteem and depression, and face behavioural and developmental challenges.

Domestic abuse can continue post-separation, with the risk to victims often increasing after the woman has left the perpetrator.⁸ Child contact is often used by perpetrators as a mechanism to control their ex-partner and children. A mother and her child(ren) may have to regularly move to remain safe and this can have serious consequences for a child's education and relationships.

Public health experts include domestic abuse as an adverse childhood experience (ACE).⁹ ACEs are stressful events occurring in childhood that have long-term impacts on health and behaviour. Domestic abuse, including coercive control, can have life-long devastating and traumatic emotional, physical, mental and financial consequences for children who do not receive appropriate support.

Early intervention is crucial. This means help is offered “as early and as soon as possible to tackle problems emerging for children and their families”.¹⁰ In an invest-to-save approach, supporting high-quality specialist services that intervene early and mitigate the traumatic effects of domestic abuse can save money in the long-term and improve outcomes for children, families and communities.

“The controlling behaviour doesn't stop because mum and dad don't live together.”

Children & Young People participant,
Everyday Heroes Programme

7 Research has also found that children who live with domestic abuse are at higher risk of experiencing child abuse, with one study finding co-occurrence of domestic abuse and child abuse in 40% of cases. See S. Walby & J. Allen (2004), *Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault and Stalking: Findings from the British Crime Survey*. London: Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate.

8 Where there is a history of domestic abuse, murders of women and children often take place at the point of separation. See M. Wilson and M. Daly (2002), *Homicide*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter, and Smith, K., Coleman, K., Eder, S. and Hall, P. (2011) *Homicides, Firearm Offences and Intimate Violence 2009/2010*. London: Home Office.

9 For more information on ACEs, please see NHS Health Scotland, <http://www.healthscotland.scot/population-groups/children/adverse-childhood-experiences-aces/overview-of-aces>

10 C4EO (2010), *Grasping the nettle: early intervention for children, families and communities*

What does this mean for elected members?

Elected members have a key role to play in tackling domestic abuse and ensuring women and children can access high-quality specialist services.

1. It is estimated domestic abuse costs the Scottish public purse £2.3 billion, but it is likely higher given the under-reporting of domestic abuse. The Scottish Women's Budget Group highlights an array of economic costs associated with domestic abuse, many of which will be incurred at a local level. These include direct costs, such as medical treatment, social services, criminal justice and housing; indirect costs related to alcohol and substance misuse and mental health issues; and economic multiplier costs, e.g., absenteeism at work or inability to participate in the labour market. The group also highlights the social multiplier effects of domestic abuse, including the impact on children.¹¹
2. Domestic abuse will affect many children in the community you have been elected to represent. Children are often left powerless and it is vital that those with a platform advocate for high-quality specialist services that intervene early and mitigate the effects of domestic abuse.
3. Elected members have statutory responsibilities under Human Rights legislation and the Equality Act (2010) to address domestic abuse.¹² In relation to children, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is the basis for Scotland's approach to supporting children: Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC).¹³ The UNCRC states that children have the right to protection from violence, abuse and neglect. It is imperative that you hold to account individuals, services and organisations in your area that have a responsibility to protect children, as set out in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.
4. You are responsible for directing your area's strategic approach and ensuring high-quality specialist services for children are available. This means ensuring that your local Violence Against Women Partnership (VAWP) has strong links with their Community Planning Partnership (CPP), Child Protection Committee, Health and Social Care Board (HSCP) / Integrated Joint Board (IJB), and that they all prioritise prevention and early intervention, as set out in Equally Safe and GIRFEC.¹⁴

"It is sooooo important that adults and children work together to make change happen."

Children & Young People participant,
Everyday Heroes Programme

11 A. R. Morrison and M. L. Biehl (eds) (1999), *"Too close to home: domestic violence in the Americas"*, Inter-American Development Bank, cited in Scottish Women's Budget Group briefing (2010), *"Spend now: save later, the case for gender budget analysis in violence against women spending"*, available at <https://scvo.org.uk/policy-research/evidence-library/2010-spend-now-save-later-the-case-for-gender-budget-analysis-in-violence-against-women-spending>

12 For more information, see the Public Sector Equality Duty guidance. <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/public-sector-equality-duty>

13 For more on GIRFEC, see <https://www.gov.scot/policies/girfec/>

14 Equally Safe (2016) is Scotland's strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls, available at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/equally-safe/>

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

The core of good practice is understanding that tackling domestic abuse is everybody’s business. No single service or organisation is responsible; the issue requires a multi-agency response at the local and national level.

Good practice emphasises that domestic abuse is not the fault of children or their mothers, and that perpetrators need to be held to account for their actions and parenting choices. Experts advocate taking a child rights-based approach to hold individuals and organisations to account in empowering children and upholding their rights. Children and young people with lived experience highlight that they want to be listened to, informed, and involved in decision-making about their lives.¹⁵

“Just because we are children doesn’t mean you shouldn’t take us seriously.”

Children & Young People participant,
Everyday Heroes Programme

There are several models and specialist services designed to support children affected by domestic abuse and increase their safety and improve outcomes. For instance, local Women’s Aid organisations across Scotland offer specialist services for children. However, it is vital that specialist services for children recovering from domestic abuse are also embedded in local authority and local Women’s Aid children’s services. Good practice ensures that all children across Scotland have access to such support.

The Safe & Together Model

A best practice model designed to improve child welfare professionals’ understanding of domestic abuse and its effects on children. Research shows that mothers are often blamed for failing to protect their children, with professionals focusing on the mother’s actions rather than those of the perpetrator. This can result in decreased engagement with services and higher risk for victims. Safe & Together operates on the principles that professionals should keep children safe and together with the non-abusing parent, develop a strengths-based partnership with non-abusing parents, and intervene directly with the perpetrator to hold them to account

“We should be looking at dad’s behaviour not mines and mum. We seemed to get the blame.”

Children & Young People participant,
Everyday Heroes Programme

¹⁵ See Everyday Heroes (2018), *Service Responses Report*, available at <https://everydayheroes.sps.ed.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/everyday-heroes-briefing1-Services.pdf>

for their actions and reduce risk of harm to the child. Adopted by 13 local authorities in Scotland, there is strong evidence to suggest the model improves how practitioners respond to women and children affected by domestic abuse; this in turn is likely to improve women and children's safety and wellbeing.¹⁶

Cedar (children experiencing domestic abuse recovery)

Scotland's leading evidence-based recovery programme for children. Available across 11 local authority areas, the Cedar model uses a groupwork approach to support children within a 12-session programme, with one-to-one support if necessary. Recognising that mothers are best placed to support their child through their recovery, Cedar works with mothers in concurrent group sessions to help strengthen attachment between mother and child and repair the bond that is so often damaged by domestic abuse.¹⁷ Groups are co-delivered by trained co-facilitators from local agencies and services, such as social work, early years and the police. This cost-effective approach upskills multi-agency practitioners, who take learning back to their own organisations. Cedar is proven to improve outcomes for children and their mothers by helping them to understand that domestic abuse is not their fault, increasing their knowledge of safety and wellbeing, and by strengthening the mother-child relationship.¹⁸

The Caledonian System

An integrated approach that works with male perpetrators convicted of domestic abuse to address their offending behaviour. This court-ordered programme lasts for at least two years and includes group work and one-to-one sessions. Concurrent with this are women's support services, where women can access safety planning, information and advice, and children's services, which ensure that children's needs are met and their rights upheld. Of the families who have completed the programme, women believe they are safer, children have improved emotional wellbeing and feel safer, and perpetrators report feeling better able to control their behaviour and have a greater understanding of the impact of domestic abuse.¹⁹

16 To find out more about whether your area uses the Safe and Together approach, please contact your local VAWP lead.

17 For more information on the effects of domestic abuse on attachment between children and mothers, see Sarah Rogers (2014), *Domestic Abuse, Attachment and Cedar*, available at <https://www.cedarnetwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/EDITED-attachment-write-up-21.pdf>

18 Please visit the [Cedar website](http://www.cedarnetwork.org.uk) to learn more about Cedar and whether your area has a Cedar Project: www.cedarnetwork.org.uk. An evaluation of the Cedar pilot projects is available at <https://www.cedarnetwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Evaluation-Report-DOWNLOAD1.pdf>

19 To find out whether the Caledonian System is in your area, contact your local VAWP lead. An evaluation of the Caledonian System is available at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/caledonian-system-evaluation-analysis-programme-tackling-domestic-abuse-scotland/pages/3/>

Key issues/questions for elected members to consider

1. Domestic abuse is estimated to cost the Scottish public purse around £2.3 billion. Domestic abuse will impact your area's local economy.
2. Research demonstrates the impact of domestic abuse on children. Domestic abuse can have far-reaching and long-term consequences, often impacting children's health, education and developmental outcomes if they are not offered the right support at the right time.
3. High-quality specialist services for children are key to mitigating the effects of domestic abuse and meeting local and national commitments to improving outcomes for children.
4. Elected members have a statutory responsibility to address domestic abuse. To help meet this commitment, you can ensure your CPP recognises the economic and social need for high-quality specialist services. You can also champion the vital work of specialist children's services.
5. Tackling domestic abuse is everyone's business. No one service is responsible for preventing or mitigating the effects of domestic abuse. Children need all of us to play a part in ensuring they have the right help at the right time from the right people so that they have the best chance in life.

Further support and contacts

Local Violence Against Women Partnerships work to deliver Equally Safe. To find out more, contact your local VAWP lead.

Improvement Service

www.improvementservice.org.uk

National service for local government in Scotland, helping improve the health, quality of life and opportunities of all people in Scotland.

Scottish Women's Aid

<https://womensaid.scot>

National domestic abuse charity who provide a range of support services for women and children experiencing domestic abuse.

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