

Domestic Violence: Frequently Asked Questions Factsheet 2009

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Introduction

This factsheet provides some answers to the questions we are most frequently asked by a range of different people: for example, students, researchers, survivors, and the media.

We hope that this new factsheet format will show how complex and inter-related the realities of domestic violence are. Often there is not a simple answer to the questions we are asked and this new factsheet tries to offer information in a way that reflects this. You will see in various sections links to other areas of the factsheet. For example, under “can alcohol or drugs cause domestic violence?” there is a reference to the section “what is the cause of domestic violence”. We have tried to provide you with as much information as possible whilst not losing sight of the fact that domestic violence is a complex issue.

This factsheet addresses the issue of domestic violence. However, Women’s Aid supports the position taken within the Women’s National Committee report (Kelly & Lovett, 2005) that violence against women requires a coordinated and gendered approach. This view is based on the overlap between different forms of gendered violence for example, between domestic and sexual violence.

What is domestic violence?

In Women’s Aid’s view domestic violence is physical, sexual, psychological or financial violence that takes place within an intimate or family-type relationship and that forms a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour. This can include forced marriage and so-called ‘honour crimes’. Domestic violence may, and often does, include a range of abusive behaviours, not all of which are, in themselves, inherently “violent”. Crime statistics and research both show that domestic violence is gender specific (i.e. most commonly experienced by women and perpetrated by men) and that any woman can experience domestic violence regardless of race, ethnic or religious group, class, disability or lifestyle. Domestic violence is repetitive, life-threatening, and can destroy the lives of women and children.

The Government defines domestic violence as "Any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality." This includes issues of concern to black and minority ethnic (BME) communities such as so called 'honour killings'.
[<http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/dv01.htm>].

Domestic violence can also take place in lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender relationships, and can involve other family members, including children.

Domestic violence is very common. Research shows that it can affect one in four women in their lifetimes, regardless of age, social class, race, disability or lifestyle. Domestic violence accounts for between **16%** and **one quarter** of all recorded violent crime. In any one year, there are **13 million** separate incidents of physical violence or threats of violence against women from partners or former partners. (Home Office, 2004; Dodd et al., 2004; Dobash and Dobash, 1980; Walby and Allen, 2004)

All forms of domestic violence – psychological, economic, emotional and physical – come from the abuser’s desire for power and control over other family members or intimate partners.

Although every situation is unique, there are common factors that link the experience of an abusive relationship. Acknowledging these factors is an important step in preventing and stopping the abuse. This list can help you to recognise if you, or someone you know, are in an abusive relationship.

- Destructive criticism and verbal abuse: shouting/mocking/accusing/name calling/verbally threatening.
- Pressure tactics: sulking; threatening to withhold money, disconnect the telephone, take the car away, commit suicide, take the children away, report you to welfare agencies unless you comply with his demands regarding bringing up the children; lying to your friends and family about you; telling you that you have no choice in any decisions.
- Disrespect: persistently putting you down in front of other people; not listening or responding when you talk; interrupting your telephone calls; taking money from your purse without asking; refusing to help with childcare or housework.
- Breaking trust: lying to you; withholding information from you; being jealous; having other relationships; breaking promises and shared agreements.
- Isolation: monitoring or blocking your telephone calls; telling you where you can and cannot go; preventing you from seeing friends and relatives.
- Harassment: following you; checking up on you; opening your mail; repeatedly checking to see who has telephoned you; embarrassing you in public.
- Threats: making angry gestures; using physical size to intimidate; shouting you down; destroying your possessions; breaking things; punching walls; wielding a knife or a gun; threatening to kill or harm you and the children.
- Sexual violence: using force, threats or intimidation to make you perform sexual acts; having sex with you when you don’t want to have sex; any degrading treatment based on your sexual orientation.
- Physical violence: punching; slapping; hitting; biting; pinching; kicking; pulling hair out; pushing; shoving; burning; strangling.
- Denial: saying the abuse doesn’t happen; saying you caused the abusive behaviour; being publicly gentle and patient; crying and begging for forgiveness; saying it will never happen again.

How common is domestic violence?

Domestic violence is very common with at least 1 in 4 women experiencing it in their lifetime and between 1 in 8 to 1 in 10 women experiencing it annually. An analysis of data from the Intimate Personal Violence (IPV) module British Crime Survey 2001 showed that 26% of women have experienced at least one incident of non-sexual domestic abuse since they were 16. Note that these figures do not include sexual abuse (which in many cases is perpetrated by a partner, former partner or other family member). If sexual assault and stalking are included, then 45% of women have experienced at least one incident of inter-personal abuse in their lifetimes¹. (Walby and Allen, 2004).

¹ Because of the way these figures have been collected, it is impossible to calculate the true extent of domestic violence, using Women’s Aid’s definition.

Though only a minority of incidents of domestic violence are reported to the police², the police still receive one call about domestic violence for every minute in the UK, an estimated 1,300 calls each day or over 570,000 each year. (Stanko, 2000). Of these, 89% were calls by women being assaulted by men.

- An analysis of 10 separate domestic violence prevalence studies found consistent findings: 1 in 4 women experience domestic violence over their lifetimes and between 6-10% of women suffer domestic violence in a given year (Council of Europe, 2002).
- The British Crime Survey found that there were an estimated 12.9 million incidents of domestic violence acts (that constituted non-sexual threats or force) against women and 2.5 million against men in England and Wales in the year preceding interview (Walby & Allen, 2004).
- **45%** women and **26%** men had experienced at least one incident of inter-personal violence in their lifetimes. (Walby and Allen, 2004) – however when there were more than 4 incidents (i.e. ongoing domestic or sexual abuse) 89% of victims were women
- Nearly 1 in 5 counselling sessions held in Relate Centres in England on 28 September 2000 mentioned domestic violence as an issue in the marriage. (Stanko, 2000).
- Every minute in the UK, the Police receive a call from the public for assistance for domestic violence. This leads to police receiving an estimated 1,300 calls each day or over 570,000 each year. (Stanko, 2000). Of these, 89% were calls by women being assaulted by men. However, according to the government National Delivery Plan, less than 24% of domestic violence crime is reported to the police (Walby and Allen, 2004).
- Repeat victimisation is common. 44% of victims of domestic violence are involved in more than one incident. No other type of crime has a rate of repeat victimisation as high (Dodd et al, July 2004).
- On average, two women a week are killed by a violent partner or ex-partner. This constitutes nearly 40% of all female homicide victims. (Povey, (ed.), 2005; Home Office, 1999; Department of Health, 2005.)
- The self-completion module of the 2001 British Crime Survey found that women are most commonly sexually assaulted by men they know. When the researchers asked women about rape experienced since the age of 16, they found that 45% were raped by current husbands or partners, 9% by former partners, and a further 29% of perpetrators were otherwise known to the victim. Only 17% were raped by strangers. (Walby and Allen, 2004)
- Of women who had experienced domestic violence, 25% had never lived with the partner who had committed the worst act of violence against them. (Walby & Allen, 2004).
- In a study of 200 women's experiences of domestic violence it was found that 60% of the women had left because they feared that they or their children would be killed by the perpetrator. (Humphreys & Thiara, 2002).

“How does domestic violence affect children?” gives further statistics in relation to children and domestic violence.

² Varying between 23% (Walby and Allen, 2004) and 35% (Home Office, 2002; see also British Crime Survey, 1998; Dodd, et al., 2004).

Who are the victims?

The vast majority of the victims of domestic violence are women and children, and women are also considerably more likely to experience repeated and severe forms of violence, and sexual abuse. Women may experience domestic violence regardless of ethnicity, religion, class, age, sexuality, disability or lifestyle. Domestic violence can also occur in a range of relationships including heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender relationships, and also within extended families.

While both men and women may experience incidents of inter-personal violence, women are considerably more likely to experience repeated and severe forms of violence. 32% of women who had ever experienced domestic violence did so four or five (or more) times, compared with 11% of the (smaller number) of men who had ever experienced domestic violence; and women constituted 89% of all those who had experienced 4 or more incidents of domestic violence. (Walby and Allen, 2004) These points are not always evident in statistical summaries (for example those produced by the Home Office) as they focus on single incidents, rather than on the complex pattern of overlapping and repeated abuse perpetrated within a context of power and control.

Women are also more likely to experience sexual violence, and the abuse they experience is also more likely to have a sustained psychological/emotional impact or result in injury or death. Nearly half the woman who had experienced intimate violence of any kind, were likely to have been victims of more than one kind of intimate abuse. (Coleman *et al.*, 2007)

Findings from an analysis of the self-completion Intimate Personal Violence (IPV) module of the British Crime Survey include the following:

- Gender is described as a “significant risk factor” as women are more likely than men to experience interpersonal violence, especially sexual violence, and to experience severe and/or repeated incidents of violence and abuse:

“Women are the overwhelming majority of the most heavily abused group. Among people subject to four or more incident of domestic violence from the perpetrator of the worst incident (since age 16) 89 per cent were women” (p vii).

“...of those women who have been subject to domestic force half (48%) have also been subject to frightening threats and nearly half (41%) to emotional or financial abuse. However, men’s experiences are much less nested, that is, of those subject to domestic force, only 9 per cent had also experienced frightening threats and 28 per cent emotional or financial abuse” (p18).

“11% of women compared to 1% of men reported frightening threats (since 16 years of age). The researchers commented that “the context of fear is an important element in the understanding of domestic violence as a pattern of coercive control” (p19). (Walby & Allen, 2004)
- There was little variation in the experience of inter-personal violence by ethnicity.
- Factors associated with increased risk of domestic violence include poverty³ (though not social class) and youth: women under the age of 30 are at considerably greater risk than those over the age of 40 years.
- The prevalence of domestic violence, found by using self-completion methodology is five times higher than the figure usually produced by interviews or other methods.

³ This includes low or no personal earnings, and lack of access to emergency money.

(Walby, 2004a)

Research in Scotland gives a similar picture: research conducted with male respondents to the Scottish Crime Survey 2000 found that men were less likely to have been repeat victims of domestic assault, less likely to be seriously injured and less likely to report feeling fearful in their own homes. (Scottish Executive Central Research Unit, 2002)

Intimate violence is one of the principle factors resulting in health inequalities across gender specifically, and forms a significant barrier to women receiving effective and equal health care, as acknowledged in national and international documents throughout the world (World Health Organisation, 2000).

Also see research evidence under “What are the effects of domestic violence on women?”

What about male victims of domestic violence?

Women’s Aid information and support services exist to respond to the needs of women and children. However, Women’s Aid recognises that controlling and abusive behaviour can also occur in male gay relationships and by women against men.

Research in Scotland, re-tracing men who were counted as victims in the Scottish Crime Survey, found that a majority of the men who said that they were victims of domestic violence, were also perpetrators of violence (13 of 22). A significant number of the men re-interviewed (13 out of 46) later said they had actually never experienced any form of domestic abuse (Scottish Executive Central Research Unit, 2002). Other evidence also confirms that men who report that they are victims of domestic violence have mostly had different experiences from women victims/survivors and require a different response. (Coulter 2007; Robinson and Rowland, 2007).

Every person has the right to live a life free from violence. For information about who to contact if you or a man you know is experiencing domestic violence, see our section entitled “What help is available”. [Link to men’s helpline]

Also see “Who are the victims?”.

Who are the abusers?

The majority of abusers are men, but in other respects, they vary: abusers come from all walks of life, from any ethnic group, religion, class or neighbourhood, and of any age. See Respect: www.respect.uk.net

Since abusers typically display different kinds of behaviours in public than they do in their private relationships, most people are not usually aware of domestic violence when it is happening in their community. Sometimes, it is difficult to believe that a person who behaves so respectably in public can behave so appallingly with their family. This can sometimes make it even more difficult for women who are trying to reach out for support, as they may feel that they will not be believed when they speak out about the violence.

The Day to Count census research on 28 September 2000 found that 81% of reported domestic violence cases, were of female victims attacked by male perpetrators; 8%

were male victims attacked by female perpetrators; 4% were female victims attacked by female perpetrators and 7% were male victims attacked by male perpetrators (Stanko, 2000).

A study carried out by the Home Office found that in more than a third (41%) of cases brought to the courts under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997, the suspect had previously had an intimate relationship with the complainant. 33% of the suspects were ex-partners, 4% were relatives, 1% a current partner and 4% were friends. In situations where the suspect previously or currently had an intimate relationship with the victim, 94% of the suspects were men (Harris, 2000).

Who is responsible for the violence?

The abuser is - always. There is no excuse for domestic violence. The abuser has a choice to use violence for which he is responsible and for which he should be held accountable. Abusers do not have to use violence. They can choose, instead, to behave non-violently and foster a relationship built on trust, honesty, fairness and respect.

The victim is never responsible for the abuser's behaviour.

"Blaming the victim" is something that abusers will often do to make excuses for their behaviour. This is part of the pattern and is in itself abusive. Sometimes abusers manage to convince their victims that they are to blame for the abuser's behaviour. Blaming his behaviour on someone or something else - the relationship, his childhood, ill health, alcohol or drug addiction - is an abuser's way of avoiding personal responsibility for his behaviour.

Children, similar to adult victims, will often feel responsible for the violence, and it is important to let them know that the violence is not their fault.

It is important that any intervention to address domestic violence prioritises the safety of survivors and holds the perpetrators accountable.

Couple counselling or mediation may sometimes be seen as a way of addressing the issue. However, there are some significant problems with this type of approach. Firstly, there is a risk to the woman's safety: asking her to discuss the violence with the perpetrator present may lead to later reprisal. Secondly, the approach itself assumes that the woman is in some way responsible or capable of altering the perpetrator's behaviour. Thirdly, it is unlikely to be successful, since the victim will feel unable to disclose her real feelings. Women's Aid therefore does not support the use of couple counselling or mediation in situations where domestic violence has occurred.

Instead, we suggest that abusers who want to try to change their behaviour attend a perpetrator programme that meets Respect service standards. For more information about perpetrator programmes, visit the Respect website: www.respect.uk.net. (Respect is a registered charity and national membership organisation promoting best practice for domestic violence perpetrator programmes and associated support services in the UK).

Also see "Effects of domestic violence on children"

Also see “What is the cause of domestic violence?”.

What is the cause of domestic violence?

Domestic violence against women by men is “caused” by the misuse of power and control within a context of male privilege. Male privilege operates on an individual and societal level to maintain a situation of male dominance, where men have power over women and children. Perpetrators of domestic violence choose to behave abusively to get what they want and gain control. Their behaviour often originates from a sense of entitlement which is often supported by sexist, racist, homophobic and other discriminatory attitudes. In this way, domestic violence by men against women can be seen as a consequence of the inequalities between men and women, rooted in patriarchal traditions that encourage men to believe they are entitled to power and control over their partners.

Whilst responsibility for the actual violence is the perpetrator’s alone, there are belief systems in our society that perpetuate abusive attitudes and make it difficult for women and children to get help. These include:

- blaming the victim for the violence;
- putting the ‘family’ before the safety of women and children;
- tolerating the use of violence;
- privileging men over women and children’s needs;
- treating domestic violence as a private matter.

Similarly, racist, homophobic and other discriminatory attitudes are also reflected in the nature of the violence against lesbians, gay men, disabled people and women and men from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities.

However, ultimately, responsibility for the violence must lie with the perpetrator of that violence, despite any societal influences that encourage a sense of entitlement to privilege and provide the context for the behaviour.

Domestic violence is learned intentional behaviour rather than directly a consequence of stress, individual pathology, substance use or a ‘dysfunctional’ relationship. Perpetrators of domestic violence frequently avoid taking responsibility for their behaviour, by blaming their violence on someone or something else, denying it took place at all or minimising their behaviour.

Research shows that violent men are most likely to perpetrate violence in response to their own sexual jealousy and possessiveness; their demands for domestic services; and in order to demonstrate male authority. Some men also believe that sex is another type of domestic service that they can demand. Violent men will also typically justify or ignore their behaviour by:

- minimising the violence, e.g. saying it was “just a slap” or “isn’t that bad”;
- justifying the behaviour to themselves and blaming the victim;
- denying the violence happened, or refusing to talk about it and expecting the victim to just “move on”.

(Dobash et al., 2000).

Can alcohol or drugs cause domestic violence?

The use (or misuse) of substances is not the underlying cause of domestic violence.

Many people who drink too much or take drugs do not abuse their partners or family members. Likewise, abusers may be violent without the use of alcohol or other drugs.

Abusers who use alcohol or drugs may use this as an excuse for their behaviour saying “I was drunk” or “I don’t remember”. Even if they genuinely do not remember what they did, it does not remove responsibility for their behaviour. There is never an excuse for domestic violence and the causes of domestic violence are far more deep rooted than simply being an effect of intoxication or alcohol/drug dependency.

If an abuser is alcohol/drug dependent, it is important that this is treated in tandem with addressing the violent behaviour. Addressing only one without the other is unlikely to prove successful.

Women experiencing domestic violence may also turn to alcohol or drugs as a form of escape from the violence. Sometimes abusers will use their partner’s addiction as an excuse for violent behaviour, saying they have been provoked into using violence. Excuses such as these are used by the perpetrator to deflect responsibility from themselves and put the focus or blame for the violence onto the victim. In these situations it is vitally important not only for women to receive the support they need, but also for perpetrators to be held accountable for their actions. They should never be excused on account of the woman’s alleged behaviour.

A study of 336 convicted offenders of domestic violence, found that alcohol was a feature in 62% of offences and 48% of offenders were alcohol dependent (Gilchrist et al, 2003).

One study of 60 women using crack cocaine in London found that **40%** reported regular physical assaults from current partner – rising to 70% if past partners were included. (Bury et al, 1999).

Also see “What is the cause of domestic violence?”
See also the [Alcohol and drugs](#) topic area on our website.

Is domestic violence caused by a lack of control?

Domestic violence is about gaining control, not a lack of control. If an abuser is careful about when, where and to whom they are abusive to, then they are showing sufficient awareness and knowledge about their actions to indicate they are not “out of control”.

Abusers use violence and tactics of coercion as a way of exercising control and getting what they want.

Also see “What is the cause of domestic violence?”

Can domestic violence be caused by mental illness?

The vast majority of people with mental health problems do not abuse other people. However, there are a small number of people who are in mental distress who may behave abusively, though this may not necessarily be caused by the mental health problem itself. If an abuser is careful about when, where and to whom they are abusive then they are showing sufficient awareness and knowledge about their actions to indicate they are making choices about their behaviour. If an abuser is random and

unpredictable, being abusive to strangers as well as people they know (e.g. in public and in the workplace), then mental illness may be a possibility.

Even if this is the case, it still doesn't mean anyone must put up with abusive behaviour. In these situations, it is important that the safety of survivors is prioritised and that the person experiencing mental distress obtains the professional care they need.

Also see "What is the cause of domestic violence?".

Mental health issues are more likely to result from domestic violence than to cause it. Women who have experienced domestic violence have higher rates of mental illness: 64% experience post-traumatic stress disorder, 48% have depression, and 18% attempt or commit suicide⁴.

See also the [Mental Health](#) topic area on our website.

Do women choose violent men?

Women do not seek out relationships with violent men. Frequently, men who will become violent do not reveal this aspect of their behaviour until the relationship has become well established – and often not until their first pregnancy. The first incident of domestic violence occurred after one year or more for 51% of the women surveyed; between three months and one year for 30%; and between one and three months for 13%. It occurred in less than one month for only 6% of women (Walby & Allen, 2004).

Also see "What is the cause of domestic violence".

Are women who experience domestic violence "helpless"?

The concept of "learned helplessness" is now outdated according to our current understanding of domestic violence. It is a psychological theory that initially arose from animal behaviour research and was popular in the 1970s and 1980s.

Women living with and leaving violent men say that they want the violence to stop and are often actively engaged in trying to protect themselves and their children from it. They may also try a number of ways to cope with or get the violence to stop, including changing their own behaviour, e.g. avoiding certain situations or appeasing the abuser by complying with his demands.

Women may also reach out to friends or family for help. When they do so, they can experience a variety of responses, ranging from the helpful to the utterly dangerous. However well-intended their help, friends or family may simply not know how to deal with the situation and may not be aware of the professional support and the legislative rights available.

When women do reach out for help from a helpline or a specialist domestic violence service, it is often an enormous relief to know that they are not alone and that there are many other women who have gone through very similar experiences.

⁴ From a Department of Health meta-analysis emerging from the VVAPP programme: Itzin, C. (2006).

In one study the women who participated were:

“found to be actively engaged in trying to deal with violence and seeking outside assistance with these efforts. These women were neither helpless or hopeless. While they did speak of the negative effects of living with violence, most had considerable strengths and held many positive views about themselves despite the harm and denigration they had suffered”. (Dobash et al., 2000).

What are the effects of domestic violence on women?

Women may be affected by domestic violence in a number of ways. They may experience any or all of the following:

- isolation from family/friends;
- loss of income or work;
- homelessness;
- emotional/psychological effects such as experiences of anxiety, depression or lowered sense of self-worth;
- poor health;
- physical injury or ongoing impairment;
- if they are pregnant, they may miscarry or the baby may be stillborn;
- time off work or study, and long-term impact on financial security and career;
- death: two women a week are killed by their partners or former partners.

Research on homelessness for Shelter has found that domestic violence is "the single most quoted reason for becoming homeless". This study found that 40% of all homeless women stated domestic violence as contributor to their homelessness (Cramer and Carter, 2002).

Findings from the self-completion module of the 2001 British Crime Survey (Walby and Allen, 2004) show:

- Injuries were often sustained as a result of domestic violence, especially among women. During the worst incident of domestic violence experienced in the last year, 46 per cent of women sustained a minor physical injury, 20 per cent a moderate physical injury, and six per cent severe injuries, while for 31 per cent it resulted in mental or emotional problems.
- Domestic violence has a detrimental impact on employment. Among employed women who suffered domestic violence in the last year, 21 per cent took time off work and two per cent lost their jobs.

Violence against women has serious consequences for their physical and mental health. Abused women are more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety, psychosomatic systems, eating problems and sexual dysfunction. Violence may also affect their reproductive health. (World Health Organisation, 2000).

46% of all female homicide victims compared with 5% of male homicide victims, were killed by current or former partners in 2001/02. In total there were 116 women who were killed by current or former partners in 2001/02, and the figures have been similar in

subsequent years. This equates to an average of over 2 women each week who are killed by a current or former partner (Flood-Page et al, 2003). Women are at greatest risk of homicide at the point of separation or after leaving a violent partner. (Lees, 2000).

Why doesn't she leave?

Whilst the risk of staying may be very high, simply leaving the relationship, does not guarantee that the violence will stop. In fact, the period during which a woman is planning or making her exit, is often the most dangerous time for her and her children. Many women are frightened of the abuser, and with good reason, as it is not uncommon for perpetrators to threaten to harm or even kill their partners or children if she leaves.

However, there may also be other reasons why a woman may not be ready to leave:

- She may still care for her partner and hope that they will change (many women do not necessarily want to leave the relationship, they just want the violence to stop).
- She may feel ashamed about what has happened or believe that it is her fault.
- She may be scared of the future (where she will go, what she will do for money, whether she will have to hide forever and what will happen to the children).
- She may worry about money, and about supporting herself and her children.
- She may feel too exhausted or unsure to make any decisions.
- She may not know where to go.
- She may be isolated from family or friends or be prevented from leaving the home or reaching out for help.
- She may have low self-esteem as a result of the abuse.
- She may believe that it is better to stay for the sake of the children (e.g. wanting her children to have a father or wishing to prevent the stigma associated with being a single parent).

Women and children need to know that they will be taken seriously and that their rights will be enforced. They need to have accessible options and be supported to make safe changes for themselves and their children. Resources and support they will need to leave safely include: money, housing, help with moving, transport, ongoing protection from the police, legal support to protect her and the children, a guaranteed income and emotional support. If a woman is not sure that these will be available to her, this may also prevent her from leaving.

Women may also seek support from family or friends and the quality of the support they receive is likely to have a significant influence on their decision-making. Sometimes women will make several attempts to leave before they actually leave permanently and safely. Regardless of her decision, it is important that the support a woman receives enables her to increase her and her children's safety regardless of the choices she makes about her relationship to the abuser. It is vitally important that women are supported while living with their abusers. If a woman feels that she will not be given ongoing support while she stays with her abusive partner, she is unlikely to seek help from the same person or organisation again.

Access to culturally specific or specialised support may also be an important consideration for women from BME communities, lesbians, disabled women, asylum seekers and women with insecure immigration status. These women often face additional barriers to seeking help in the first place - such as physical barriers, language,

poverty and discrimination. Specialised help and a range of mechanisms to make contact and receive support are available via Women's Aid and throughout the England-wide network of domestic violence services.

Perhaps what we really should be asking is "why do we let the violence continue?" For example, many agencies providing services for men do not screen for domestic violence. Workers across agencies have a role in challenging men with the nature and consequences of their violence, their attitudes to women, and the fact that they chose to use violence, instead of excusing, condoning or minimising the violence.

A recent survey revealed that whilst 20 per cent of women admit they have lived, or do currently live in fear of violence, more than half (52 per cent) told researchers they'd be too embarrassed and ashamed to tell their friends, and 59 per cent said they would not tell their families. (YouGov, 2004).

Leaving does not stop the violence: these are some findings from recent studies:

- Women are at greatest risk of homicide at the point of separation or after leaving a violent partner. (Lees, 2000).
- 60% of the women in one study left the abuser because they feared that they would be killed if they stayed. A further 54% of women left the abuser because they said that they could see that the abuse was affecting their children and 25% of the women said that they feared for their children's lives. (Humphreys & Thiara, 2002).
- The British Crime Survey found that, while for the majority of women leaving the violent partner stopped the violence, 37% said it did not. 18% of those who had left their partner were further victimised by stalking and other forms of harassment. 7% of those who left said that the worst incident of domestic violence took place after they had stopped living with their partner. (Walby & Allen, 2004).
- 76% of separated women reported suffering post-separation violence. (Humphreys & Thiara, 2002). Of these women:
 - 76% were subjected to continued verbal and emotional abuse;
 - 41% were subjected to serious threats towards themselves or their children;
 - 23% were subjected to physical violence;
 - 6% were subjected to sexual violence;
 - 36% stated that this violence was ongoing.
- In addition to this, more than half of those with post-separation child contact arrangements with an abusive ex-partner continued to have serious, ongoing problems with this contact. (Humphreys & Thiara, 2002).
- 46% of the women contacted outreach services for the first time when they were still living with their abuser; 90% of these women had since left the abuser. (Humphreys & Thiara, 2002).

Domestic violence and pregnancy

In 30% of cases of domestic violence, the abuse first started during pregnancy. (McWilliams and McKiernan, 1993). Amongst a group of pregnant women attending primary care in East London, 15% reported violence during their pregnancy; just under 40% reported that violence started whilst they were pregnant, whilst 30% who reported

violence during pregnancy also reported they had at sometime suffered a miscarriage as a result (Coid, 2000). Another study found that between 4 and 9 women in every 100 are abused during their pregnancies and/or after the birth. (Taft, 2002)

Domestic violence has been identified as a prime cause of miscarriage or still-birth (Mezey, 1997), and of maternal deaths during childbirth (Lewis and Drife, 2001, 2005). Legally, if a miscarriage is caused by abuse, the assailant can be charged under S.58 of the Offences against the Person Act, “using an instrument with intent to cause a miscarriage⁵. If a baby is born prematurely as a result of an assault, and then dies, the assailant may be charged with manslaughter⁶.

12% of the 378 women whose death was reported to the Confidential Enquiry on Maternal Deaths had voluntarily reported domestic violence to a healthcare professional during their pregnancy. (Lewis and Drife, 2001) None had routinely been asked about domestic violence so this is almost certainly an underestimate. Within the six weeks following birth, 11 new mothers were known to have been murdered by their male partners during 2000-02, and 14% of all the women who died during or immediately after pregnancy (43 women) had reported domestic violence to a health professional during the pregnancy. (Lewis and Drife, 2005)

One study in the USA found a significant relationship between pregnancy, domestic violence, and suicide: pregnant women who attempt suicide are very likely to have been abused. (Stark and Flitcraft, 1996)

What are the effects of domestic violence on children?

The majority of children witness the violence that is occurring and in 80% of cases they are in the same or the next room. In about half of all domestic violence situations, the children are also being directly abused themselves. Children living in households where domestic violence is occurring are now identified as “at risk” under the Adoption and Children Act 2002: from 31 January 2005, Section 120 of this act extended the legal definition of harming children to include harm suffered by seeing or hearing ill treatment of others.

Children can “witness domestic violence” in many different ways. For example, they may be in the same room and may even get caught in the middle of an incident in an effort to make the violence stop; they may be in the room next door and hear the abuse or see their mother’s physical injuries following an incident of violence; they may be forced to stay in one room or may not be allowed to play; they may be forced to witness sexual abuse or they may be forced to take part in verbally abusing the victim. All children witnessing domestic violence are being emotionally abused.

Children can experience both short and long term cognitive, behavioural and emotional effects as a result of witnessing domestic abuse. It is important to remember that each child will respond to the trauma differently and some may be resilient and not exhibit any negative effects. Children’s responses to the trauma of witnessing domestic violence

⁵ See *Bristol Evening Post* 18th December 2004, report on Nycoma Edwards whose assault on his girlfriend led to miscarrying at 4 and half months.

⁶ See report from July 2000 of a Carlyle case where assault resulted in birth of baby (born at 8 and a half months by caesarean section).

may vary according to a multitude of factors including, but not limited to, age, race, sex and stage of development. It is equally important to remember that the common effects experienced by children can also be caused by something other than witnessing domestic violence and therefore a thorough assessment of a child's situation is vital to ensure appropriate response and support.

These are some of the effects on children of witnessing domestic violence, described in a briefing by the Royal College of Psychiatrists (2004):

- they may become anxious or depressed;
- they may have difficulty sleeping;
- they have nightmares or flashbacks;
- they can be easily startled;
- they may complain of physical symptoms such as tummy aches;
- they may start to wet their bed;
- they may have temper tantrums;
- they may behave as though they are much younger than they are;
- they may have problems with school;
- they may become aggressive or they may internalise their distress and withdraw from other people;
- they may have a lowered sense of self-worth;
- older children may begin to play truant or start to use alcohol or drugs;
- they may begin to self-harm by taking overdoses or cutting themselves;
- they may have an eating disorder.

Children may also feel angry, guilty, insecure, alone, frightened, powerless or confused. They may have ambivalent feelings towards both the abuser and the non-abusing parent.

The “cycle of violence” otherwise known as the “intergenerational theory” is often referred to when considering the effects of domestic violence on children, however this research is inconsistent. At Women's Aid we believe that this theory is disempowering and ineffective when working with children. A boy who has witnessed domestic violence does not have to grow up to be an abuser, and a girl does not have to become a victim of domestic violence later in life. Educational programmes focusing on healthy relationships, and challenging gender inequality, sexual stereotyping, and domestic violence, should be integrated with work on anti-bullying and conflict resolution as a mandatory part of the PHSE curriculum in all schools. These would act as important preventive measures. View our article on the [cycle of violence](#).

It is important that the non-abusive parent and the children are supported to ensure that they are safe and that the effects and the risk of ongoing violence are not left unaddressed. Specialist domestic violence services have a crucial role in helping women and children deal with the effects of domestic violence on children.

Some statistics on domestic violence and its effects on children

- At least 750,000 children a year witness domestic violence. Nearly three quarters of children on the 'at risk' register live in households where domestic violence occurs. (Department of Health, 2002).

- The link between child physical abuse and domestic violence is high, with estimates ranging between 30% to 66% depending upon the study. (Hester et al, 2000; Edleson, 1999; Humphreys & Thiara, 2002; Mullender and Morley, 1994; Radford and Hester, 2007.)
- Children who live with domestic violence are at increased risk of behavioural problems and emotional trauma, and mental health difficulties in adult life. (Kolbo, *et al.*, 1996; Morley and Mullender, 1994; Hester *et al.*, 2000, 2007)
- Nearly three quarters of children on the 'at risk' register live in households where domestic violence occurs and 52% of child protection cases involving domestic violence. (Department of Health, 2002; Farmer and Owen, 1995).
- In 75% to 90% of incidents of domestic violence, **children** are in the same or the next room. (Hughes, 1992).
- 70% of children living in UK refuges have been abused by their father. (Bowker *et al.*, 1998)

Domestic violence and Child Contact

Unfortunately, even after separating from their abusers, many mothers find it extremely difficult to protect their children from ongoing abuse as a result of the requirement to comply with contact orders made by the family courts. Women's Aid supports a child's right to **safe** contact, but recognises that contact with an abusing parent may not always be in the children's best interests.

- In 1999, a survey of 130 abused parents it was found that 76% of the 148 children ordered by the courts to have contact with their estranged parent were said to have been abused in the following ways during visits: 10% were sexually abused; 15% were physically assaulted; 26% were abducted or involved in an abduction attempt; 36% were neglected during contact; and 62% suffered emotional harm. Most of these children were under the age of 5. (Radford, Sayer & AMICA, 1999).
- In their response to the consultation paper on "Contact between Children and Violent Parents", the Association of Chief Officers of Probation stated that information received from local Family Court Welfare Services suggests that domestic violence is present in almost 50% of cases, where a welfare report is ordered. (Association of Chief Officers of Probation, 1999).
- In a survey of refuge services, Women's Aid found that in reported cases since April 2001, a total of 18 children were ordered to have contact with parents who had committed offences against children and a total of 64 children were ordered to have contact with parents whose behaviour previously caused children to be placed on the Child Protection Register. 21 of these children were ordered to have unsupervised contact with the abusive parent (Saunders & Barron, 2004).

- Only 3% of service providers surveyed by Women's Aid think that appropriate measures are being taken to ensure the safety of the child and resident parent in most contact cases involving domestic violence (Saunders & Barron, 2004).
- The number of contact orders refused has dropped drastically over the last 4 years. In 2002, there were 61,356 applications for contact orders under the Children Act 1989, of those, only 518 (0.8%) were refused. (Lord Chancellor's Department, 2003).
- Women's Aid has compiled a list of 29 children (in 13 families) who have been killed as a result of contact or residence arrangements in England and Wales over the last ten years (however, since there are no national statistics kept on this, the actual figure may be higher). Ten of these children were killed since 2002. With regard to five of these families, contact was ordered by the court (letter dated 16.7.2002 to Women's Aid Federation of England from Rosie Winterton, Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department). You can access information about this report online.

Is domestic violence a crime?

Domestic violence may comprise a number of different behaviours and consequences, so there is no single criminal offence of "domestic violence". However, many forms of domestic violence are crimes – for example, harassment, assault, criminal damage, attempted murder, rape and false imprisonment. Being assaulted, sexually abused, threatened or harassed by a partner or family member is just as much a crime as violence from a stranger, and often more dangerous.

Successful prosecutions for domestic violence cases rose from 46% (of all cases brought before the courts) in a December 2003 'snapshot' to 65% during the whole of 2006-07. The latest figures from the CPS are as follows:

Date	Convictions	% convicted	Unsuccessful	% unsuccessful	Totals
2004-5	19,468	55.1%	15,867	44.9%	35,335
2005-6	30,213	59.8%	20,343	40.2%	35,335
2006-7	37,505	65.2%	20,034	34.8%	57,539
2007-14/1/08	34,034	68.4%	15,698	31.6%	49,732

Percentages are based on the number of cases either charged by police, or accepted for prosecution by the CPS, and which were identified as allegations involving domestic violence. (Source: Parliamentary question 22/1/08)

Not all forms of domestic violence are illegal, however; for example, some forms of emotional abuse are not defined as crimes. Nevertheless, these types of violence can also have a serious and lasting impact on a woman's or child's sense well-being and autonomy.

What legal rights do victims of domestic violence have?

Whether or not the abuser is prosecuted, those who experience domestic violence have rights under the civil law. Injunctions or court orders for protection against further abuse (a non-molestation order) and/or to keep the abuser away from the home (an occupation order) may be applied for in either the magistrates' family proceedings court or in the

county court. The homelessness legislation also enables those who are unable to return home because of violence to apply for emergency accommodation on grounds of homelessness.

See [The Survivor's Handbook](#) online for more information on legal rights and other options.

What is the cost of domestic violence?

As well as the individual costs associated with a loss of quality of life and loss of life itself, domestic violence also costs our society as a whole.

The estimated total cost of domestic violence to society in monetary terms is £23 billion per annum. This figure includes an estimated £3.1 billion as the cost to the state and £1.3 billion as the cost to employers and human suffering cost of £17 billion. (Walby, 2004). This estimated total cost is based on the following:

- The cost to the criminal justice system is £1 billion per annum. (This represents one quarter of the criminal justice budget for violent crime including the cost of homicide to adult women annually of £112 million).
- The cost of physical healthcare treatment resulting from domestic violence, (including hospital, GP, ambulance, prescriptions) is £1,220,247,000, i.e. 3% of total NHS budget.
- The cost of treating mental illness and distress due to domestic violence is £176,000,000.
- The cost to the social services is £0.25 billion.
- Housing costs are estimated at £0.16 billion.
- The cost of civil legal services due to domestic violence is £0.3billion

The statistics collated by Walby above are recognised as an under-estimate because public services don't collect information on the extent to which their services are used as a result of domestic violence. The research doesn't include costs to those areas for which it was difficult to collect any baseline information – for example cost to social services work with vulnerable adults, cost to education services, the human cost to children, (including moving schools and the impact this has on their education), and it excludes the cost of therapeutic and other support within the voluntary sector.

The cost of domestic homicide is estimated by the Home Office at over one million pounds: a total of £1, 097, 330 for each death, or £112 million per year.

Also see “What are the effects of domestic violence on women?” and “What are the effects of domestic violence on children?”

How many women and children use refuge or other domestic violence services?

The total number of women supported by domestic violence services in England (both residential and non-residential) on one typical day (2nd November 2006) – was 11, 310. This has increased by 50% since 2003.

On a typical day, 3615 women and 3,580 children are resident in refuge accommodation in England. This is an increase of 12% over the past 4 years. 50% of these children are aged under 5 years.

Table 1: Estimated numbers of women and children using refuge accommodation annually

Survey Period	Women	Children
2002/03	17,094	21,465
2003/04	18,569	23,084
2004/05	19,836	24,347
2005/06	16, 815	19, 450

Table 2: Estimated numbers of women with no recourse to public funds entering refuge

Survey Period	Women given refuge accommodation	% of total women given refuge
2002/03	301	1.76%
2003/04	368	1.98%
2004/05	477	2.4%
2005/6	305	1.8%

Women and children provided with floating support, outreach and advocacy services

Many domestic violence organisations offer non-refuge-based services such as outreach, floating support, and advocacy services in addition to, or separate from, the provision of refuge accommodation. **78%** of organisations responding to the 2005-6 Annual Survey offer some of these services, a majority of which also provide refuge accommodation⁷. 19% of all those responding offer outreach, advocacy and/or floating support services only.

Extrapolating⁸ from the figures provided by those responding to our Annual Survey, we estimate that **114, 430 women** and **7, 660 children** were directly supported by outreach, advocacy and floating support services during 2005-6. A further **68, 850 children** were indirectly supported through the support given to their mothers⁹.

Table 3: Estimated numbers of women and children supported by all domestic violence services (both refuge-based and non-refuge-based) annually

⁷ 75% of those offering non-refuge-based domestic violence services also provide refuge accommodation.

⁸ Because the response from outreach-only services was lower (at only 50%) than that from services offering refuge accommodation, we have made an additional adjustment to the data from this group to take this into account; i.e. using the overall response rate of 67%.

⁹ This figure is likely to be considerably under-estimated, given that many services did not keep records of the numbers of children living with those women they supported in non-refuge services.

Survey Period	Women – total number supported in all services	Children – total number supported in all services
2002/03	122, 570	87, 796
2003/04	142, 526	106, 118
2004/05	196, 205	129, 193
2005/6	131, 245	95, 960

A full report of the results of our Annual Surveys 2004-5 and 2005-6 plus our 2006 Census day results are available from our website: www.womensaid.org.uk

What help is available?

Everyone has the right to live free from abuse and fear. If you are experiencing domestic violence, you may feel humiliated, frightened, ashamed, alone and confused. Please know that you are not to blame and you are not alone.

You can contact one of the National Domestic Violence Helplines in England, Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland, or a local refuge or other domestic abuse support services (see contact information below) for practical and emotional support, advocacy and information.

You could also begin to plan how you would respond in a crisis to help keep you and your children safe. If it is safe and practical for you, you could store emergency clothes, money, special children's toys, important documents, addresses and telephone numbers, duplicate car keys with someone you can trust. Plan how to contact emergency help at any time. It may even help to agree signals with a neighbour if you aren't able to use the telephone. Whether or not you decide to leave your abuser, one of the National Domestic Violence Helplines or local refuge organisations or domestic violence support services can help you plan how to leave in an emergency and to find a place of safety. If you decide to move away by yourself, make sure it's safe and that you can't be traced straightaway.

For more help and information see [The Survivor's Handbook](#) on our website. Below we give some contact information for organisations that can help.

999 - Emergency services

If you are concerned for your own or some else's immediate safety ring the Police on 999.

0808 2000 247 - Freephone 24 Hour National Domestic Violence Helpline

Run partnership between Refuge and Women's Aid Federation of England.

The Helpline service provides support, information and a listening ear to women and children experiencing domestic violence and plays a pivotal role in assisting women and children to access a place of safety in a women's refuge. The Helpline also offers support and information to friends, family members and external agencies that are calling on behalf of a woman.

The Helpline is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week, by fully trained female Helpline support workers and volunteers. Helpline staff will discuss the available options for women and children experiencing domestic violence and, if appropriate, refer

callers on to refuges and other sources of help and information. Our aim is to make women aware of the options so that they can make informed choices.

The Helpline is a member of Language Line and can provide access to an interpreter for non-English speaking callers. The Helpline can also access the BT Type Talk Service.

The 24 Hour National Domestic Violence Helpline will also refer male callers who require help to appropriate support groups.

You can also contact the 24 Hour National Domestic Violence Helpline and local domestic violence services by:

Email: helpline@womensaid.org.uk
Post: P.O.Box 391, Bristol, BS99 7WS

Other Helplines in the UK

You can also contact:

028 9033 1818 – Northern Ireland Women's Aid 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline

0800 027 1234 – Scottish Domestic Abuse Helpline

0808 80 10 800 – Wales Domestic Abuse Helpline

Self-referrals to Domestic Violence Services

You can also self-refer to most refuge organisation by contacting one of the services listed in the [Domestic Abuse Directory](#) on the Women's Aid website.

Broken Rainbow Helpline

Broken Rainbow Helpline is a UK-wide specialist confidential service for lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transgender people experiencing homophobic or transphobic domestic violence. The helpline can be accessed anonymously. Staff offer information, support and advice including referrals to other services as necessary.

Helpline Number (Survivors): 08452 604460 Check website for opening hours.

Website: www.broken-rainbow.org.uk

Email address: mail@broken-rainbow.org.uk

Men's Advice Line

www.mensadvice.org.uk

If you are a man or you want to call on behalf of a man who is experiencing domestic violence, you can contact Male (Men's Advice Line) on 0808 801 0327. The Men's Advice Line is managed by Respect: see below.

Respect

Respect is the UK association for domestic violence perpetrator programmes and associated support services. Domestic violence is most often perpetrated by men against women, but does also occur in same sex relationships and in a small number of cases from women to men. Because of this, the Respect Phoneline will specialise in providing services to male perpetrators, but will also be available for female perpetrators and those in same sex relationships.

Tel: 0845 122 8609 www.respect.uk.net

Legal Rights

For information on legal rights for women and children experiencing domestic violence, see the topic areas for [Civil Law](#) and [Criminal law](#).

You could also contact Right of Women (ROW). Rights of Women is a not-for-profit organisation committed to informing, educating and empowering women on the law and their legal rights.

Visit www.rightsofwomen.org.uk

email: info@row.org.uk

ROW Legal advice line: 0207 251 6577. Textphone: 0207 490 2562.

ROW also run a Sexual Violence legal advice line: 020 7251 8887. Textphone: 020 7490 2592.

For information on your rights to legal aid, contact

Community Legal Services 0845 345 4345, www.clsdirect.org.uk

The CLS is part of the Legal Services Commission: 020 7759 0317/8/ 0800 085 6643

www.legalservices.gov.uk

email: family@legalservices.gov.uk

The Law Society on 020 7242 1222 will provide a list of solicitors in your area.

For further information and briefings about children's rights and child contact, please visit the [Child Contact](#) topic area of our website.

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