

Advance questions for VAWGRN Webinar three – Responding to the Rise in Domestic Abuse
15.7.20

COVID questions

1. The Black Lives Matter movement has been at the forefront of social media recently, could you comment on how intersectionality might relate to the impact of COVID on different groups of victim-survivors?

Response from Nicky Lambert:

Domestic violence services often show a disproportionate numbers of BAME women using their services (compared to the UK BAME population). On one hand we get laws on forced marriage etc. but we can all see women's services esp. specialist women's services experiencing funding cuts. Pragma Patel (who was chair of Southall Black Sisters) said it well "not all women experience domestic violence in similar circumstances. Issues of racism, culture, language and immigration status, for example, make the task of accessing services much more harder for black and minority women. There is therefore a greater need for part of its specialist resources and staff."

Can I recommend some older but really useful reads:

- Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color - Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw
<https://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/mapping-margins.pdf>
- Domestic violence: on the frontline of intersectionality
<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/domestic-violence-on-frontline-of-intersectionality/>

This is a more current resource from the Pathfinder project: <https://safelives.org.uk/spotlight-4-honour-based-violence-and-forced-marriage>

Response from Rachel Robbins:

For a theoretical perspective on intersectionality and violence against women, I'm going to recommend a couple of chapters from a book I co-edited: Nayak, S. and Robbins, R. (2019) *Intersectionality in Social Work: Activism and Practice in Context* which has chapters written by activists and practitioners. In particular, I would recommend the chapters by Siddiqui and Thiari, Jones and Larasi and Kumar – all deal with the specific issues of providing support services for those experiencing domestic abuse for marginalised women. There is also a chapter on the Black Lives Matters movement from Kamaria Muntu and a chapter on working with the Lesbian Immigration Support Group by Held and McCarthy.

2. How can a victim report domestic abuse when leaving with the abuser especially during this lockdown and what provisions are there for victims fleeing domestic abuse? What are the challenges now in reaching victims during covid19

Response from Nicky Lambert:

This is the SafeLives advice <https://safelives.org.uk/news-views/domestic-abuse-and-covid-19> This is the government website on reporting <https://www.gov.uk/report-domestic-abuse> and advice: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/domestic-abuse-how-to-get-help#get-help-if-you-or-someone-you-know-is-a-victim> Some of the challenges to effective support include the fact that everyone's working patterns are disrupted, and some physical services are closed. In addition we are seeing a rise in numbers of cases being reported and fewer safeguarding reports with children being home-schooled. People's options to go outside has been limited and help-seeking is being channelled online these combine to leave people at risk of violence and control more isolated and in close proximity to people who may hurt them.

3. Is there any evidence to show that using the code 55 on the phone has been effective?

Response from Nicky Lambert:

I don't know about evidence of effectiveness but bear in mind that dialling 55 won't automatically track your location, and it's not always possible to identify your precise location if you are calling from a mobile phone – which a lot of people are.

4. Either during or prior to Covid-19, to what extent has an increase in knowledge, awareness and reporting been a factor in the rise in reported domestic abuse cases? And has the rise in reporting mainly rise come from victims or support networks (and does this vary by type of abuse)? Are there any noticeable trends or patterns of abuse (nationally) during the Pandemic? Interested to know why at local level significant we are not seeing significant increases at the levels reported nationally

Response from Ruth Weir

Some police forces, such as the Met, have reported a 10% increase in reporting during lockdown and the increase is mainly thought to be from neighbours:

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/jul/15/domestic-abuse-calls-to-london-police-rise-by-a-tenth-during-lockdown>

Internationally the UN have noted increases in reporting <https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/un-supporting-%E2%80%98trapped%E2%80%99-domestic-violence-victims-during-covid-19-pandemic>

5. Once we understand the who, where and why, how can we best communicate this to policy makers, the media, politicians? I am a trustee at Joanna Project (where I used to be an outreach worker) who work with hard to reach women often involved in street sex work and all the dangers that involves. I also run the West Yorkshire Hub for Tender who run drama workshops about Healthy Relationships in schools aiming to raise awareness of and prevent domestic violence. I am interested to learn more about how the women and young people I am involved with can use their voices and experiences to impact policy. In your opinion what is the best way to enable their voices to be heard?

Response from Nicky Lambert:

Form coalitions with common goal to maximise your voice, *focus your message* what do you want/who do you want to persuade/what evidence will they need – do they want data or narrative or both? Don't underestimate your ability to effect change!

These are useful resources: <https://esrc.ukri.org/research/impact-toolkit/influencing-policymakers/guide-to-influencing-public-affairs/influencing-uk-public-policy/>

https://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-information-office/Publications-2015/Getting_Your_Voice_Heard_WEB.pdf

General questions

6. Is it always men who initiate domestic violence?

Response from Nicky Lambert:

No and we mustn't overlook the experience of domestic violence in same sex relationships.

Response from Ruth Weir:

No, my research found that overall 78% of victims were female. When you break it down into relationship type then the proportions change a little with a higher proportion of females victims for partners and ex-partners, but more gender symmetry amongst siblings.

7. Has there been a similar rise in domestic abuse against men?

Response from Nicky Lambert:

I don't have that data but I would assume from what I have seen locally I would suppose that people who have a history of violence have continued and often increased that behaviour - whoever their targets are.

8. In Portugal, Domestic Violence is tracked resourcing to geographic areas. On the islands, the cases per million is much higher than on the main land. I live on the islands and I know that that isn't true, even though the official numbers represent that. Is it possible to say that measures applied can be more efficient on the islands?

Response from Ruth Weir:

This is a very interesting question. In my research I found that a variation in the amount of abuse could be linked to neighbour factors, including income, levels of anti-social behaviour and population density. Between areas that were equally deprived reporting to the police varied in areas where victims had access to a wider range of services and in areas that had collective efficacy (community spirit). Is the resident population on the islands the same throughout the year, or could it be altered by tourism (with more visitors in the summer who wouldn't be recorded in the official population statistics)?

9. Can we prevent domestic abuse?

Response from Nicky Lambert:

I don't know but I think we can make it less likely, we can certainly make it less acceptable and we can decrease the amount of children brutalised by it who grow up believing that it's part of an 'everyday' experience.

Response from Ruth Weir:

We can try and identify abuse earlier and understand more about the risk factors. Having this understanding will help us to resource appropriate services in the right areas.

10. Is there any data to suggest there has been an increase for the 16-18 age group concerning reports of Domestic abuse

Response from Nicky Lambert:

The short answer is yes, these are useful reads which addresses your question directly:

<https://safelives.org.uk/knowledge-hub/spotlights/spotlight-3-young-people-and-domestic-abuse> and <https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Safe%20Young%20Lives%20web.pdf>

Response from Ruth Weir

My data suggests that those aged 16-24 are in the second more prevalent age group.

11. When I do family assessments for parents who are new to moving into our locality I am required to ask if there is a history of DV. Please advise what question/s I can use to ask a woman who I have just met if she has a history or current DV?

Response from Nicky Lambert:

Great question ! My PowerPoint notes pages have that information in. These conversations need to have time and they need to be carried out in privacy and with an official interpreter if the individual does not speak English. The Pathfinder toolkit is a health resource but the end sections have lots of examples about asking questions and effective responses:

https://communications.safelivesresearch.org.uk/Pathfinder%20Toolkit_Final.pdf The NICE Guidance suggests the following:

- has anyone ever hit, slapped, restrained or hurt you physically? Or emotionally?
- at times, are you afraid of your partner? Previous partner? (it could be any other significant person in their life, i.e; children, parents or other family members?)
- have you ever felt unsafe in your home situation?
- does your partner* like to boss you around?
- if he/she does not get their own way, how do they act?
- have you been forced to have sex or do sexual things you are uncomfortable doing?
- when arguing with your partner, do they threaten to hurt you or the children, or someone else?
- has your partner ever stopped you from leaving home, visiting family or friends, or going to work or school?
- do you have a say in how to spend money?
- are any of these things going on now?

*partner or spouse or boyfriend/girlfriend or ex-spouse or old boyfriend/girlfriend, or any other significant person in their life. For example it might be a grown up child, perpetrators in “forced marriages” are often the mother/grandmother. Other family members might also be the perpetrators.

Questions to Rachel Robbins

1. What are the challenges that professionals face in identifying those individuals who may have been subject to domestic abuse during the COVID 19 pandemic and how do we then assess risk to the individual and children? This is especially in relation to abuse such as Coercive control which will have been heightened during the lockdown period.

Response from Rachel Robbins:

Risk assessment is an ongoing process and one of the problems we have with risk assessment around domestic abuse is that it is often seen as a one off intervention through the use of the DASH RIC form. Many of the suggestions that Nicky has made around good practice are worth restating here – especially the questions found in the Pathfinder toolkit.

BASW have also produced a guide for social workers which can be found here:

<https://www.basw.co.uk/media/news/2020/apr/domestic-abuse-and-child-welfare-practice-guide-social-workers>

Key issues are to make sure that there is an opportunity for safe disclosure. Keep communication lines open. For social workers in particular, be aware that perpetrators often use the threat of social services and removal of children to maintain power – social workers should not collude with this. Make sure you have partnership arrangements with third sector providers who are often seen as more neutral when it comes to child protection.

In a recent conversation with a DHR chair, her golden rule was – whatever a perpetrator does or says, good intervention should do the opposite. So, find out what the woman is most scared off and work from there.

Questions to Ruth Weir

1. Now that the restrictions have eased, have the stats gone down nationally?

Response from Ruth Weir:

I haven’t seen any data yet, but the police are expecting the stats to go up as those unable to report during lockdown seek help.