

Domestic Violence: Frequently Asked Questions Factsheet 2004/05

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Introduction

Women's Aid regularly produces factsheets about domestic violence giving new research findings in the area. In a change to our usual format, the 2004/05 factsheet provides up to date information about various aspects of domestic violence in a questions and answers format. It provides answers to

the questions we are most frequently asked by a range of different people: students, researchers, survivors, the media etc.

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 recent 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, bi-sexual 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.

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.

- *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).*
- *British Crime Survey research found that “women are most commonly sexually assaulted by men they know”. When the researchers asked women about the last incident of rape experienced since the age of 16, they found that 45% were raped by current partners, 11% by former partners, 11% were raped on “dates”, 16% by acquaintances and 10% by “other intimates”. 8% were raped by strangers (Myhill & Allen, 2002).*
- *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).*

Who are the victims?

Domestic violence can occur regardless of ethnicity, religion, class, age, sexuality, disability or lifestyle. It can also occur in a range of relationships including heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender relationships.

However, whilst both men and women may experience incidents of inter-personal violence, women are considerably more likely to experience repeated and severe forms of violence, including sexual violence. The violence they experience is also more likely to have a sustained psychological/emotional impact or result in injury or death.

- *3% of women living in refuges were disabled during the year 1997/98, according to a research report detailing a Women’s Aid survey of that period (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2002).*
- *Findings from the British Crime Survey (Walby & Allen, 2004) show that:*
 - *There was little variation in the experience of inter-personal violence by ethnicity.*
 - *Gender is described as a “significant risk factor” as women are more likely than men to experience interpersonal violence, especially sexual violence.*
 - *“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).*
- *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).*
- *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. The survey retraced men who were counted as victims in the Scottish Crime Survey and 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).*
- *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.

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”.

Also see “Who are the victims?”.

Who are the abusers?

Abusers come from all walks of life. They can come from any ethnic group, religion, class or neighbourhood. They may be older or younger. However, whilst they may also be any gender, the majority of perpetrators are men, and the effects of the violence are markedly more severe for women. (See “What are the effects of domestic violence on women?”). Also see the Respect Phonenumber in our section entitled “What help is available”.

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).*

How common is domestic violence?

Domestic violence is very common with 1 in 4 women experiencing it in their lifetime and between 1 in 8 to 1 in 10 women experiencing it annually. Though less than half of all incidents are ever reported to the Police, the Police still receive one call about domestic violence for every minute in the UK.

- *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).*
- *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).*
- *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). However, according to the British Crime Survey, only 40.2% of actual domestic violence crime is reported to the Police (Dodd et al, July 2004).*
- *Also see "What is domestic violence?" for further prevalence statistics.*

- *Also see “How does domestic violence affect children?” for further prevalence statistics.*

What is the cause of domestic violence?

Abusers choose to behave violently 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.

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. 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.

Similarly, racist, homophobic and other discriminatory attitudes are also reflected in the nature of the violence against lesbians, gay men, disabled people and ethnic minority men and women.

However, not all domestic violence occurs within a context of traditional power relations and ultimately, responsibility for the violence must lie with the perpetrator of that violence, despite any societal influences that we may draw on in order to understand the context of the behaviour.

Domestic violence is learned intentional behaviour rather than the 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.

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
- *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 eg, 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 & Dobash, 2000).*

Can alcohol or drugs cause domestic violence?

Many people who drink too much or take drugs do not abuse their partners or family members. Likewise, abuse does not exclusively occur when an abuser is drunk or under the influence of drugs. The use of alcohol or drugs is therefore not the underlying cause of domestic violence.

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 that women receive the support they need, but also, that the perpetrator is held accountable for their actions and that they are not excused because of the woman’s behaviour.

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

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 (eg in public and in the workplace), then mental illness may be a possibility. Even if it is, 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?".

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. In fact, for many women, the violence does not start until their first pregnancy.

- *Also see "What is the cause of domestic violence"*.
- *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%; between one and three months for 13% and under one month for 6% of women (Walby & Allen, 2004).*
- *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).*

What are the effects of domestic violence on women?

Women may be affected by domestic violence in a number of ways:

- loss of opportunity
- 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

➤ death

- *Homelessness research 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 (Shelter, 2002).*
- *Findings from a British Crime survey show (Walby & Allen, 2004):*
 - *"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. Among men, 41 per cent sustained a minor physical injury, 14 per cent a moderate physical injury, one per cent severe injuries and nine per cent mental or emotional problems (p viii)".*
 - *"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 - 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).*

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 feel too exhausted or unsure to make any decisions
- 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 (eg wanting a father for her children and/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 if these are 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 also is vitally important that women are also supported whilst living with an abuser. If she feels that she will be excluded from ongoing support if she does not leave, she is unlikely to seek help from the same person or organisation again.

Access to culturally specific or specialised support is also an important consideration for women from ethnic minorities, lesbians, disabled women, asylum seekers and women with an 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 happening, more than half (52 per cent) told researchers they'd be too embarrassed and ashamed to tell*

their friends. Even more (59 per cent) would stay tight-lipped with family. (YouGov, 2004).

- *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 the “Routes to Safety” 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. “In fact, 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. For 18%, of those that had left their partner, they were further victimised by stalking and other forms of harassment. 7% of those that left said that the worst incident of domestic violence took place after they stopped living with their partner. (Walby & Allen, 2004).*
- *76% of separated women reported suffering post-separation violence in the “Routes to Safety” study. 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 in the “Routes to Safety” study 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).*

What are the effects of domestic violence on children?

The majority of children witness the violence that is occurring and in about half of all domestic violence situations, they are also being directly abused themselves.

Children can “witness domestic violence” in a variety of 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.

From 31 January 2005, Section 120 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 came into force, which extends the legal definition of harming children to include harm suffered by seeing or hearing ill treatment of others, especially in the home.

Children can experience both short and long term cognitive, behavioural and emotional effects. 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 DV may vary according to a multitude of factors including, but 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 treatment.

Children are individuals and may respond to witnessing abuse in different ways. These are some of the effects 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
- 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 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. Anti-violence education in schools and other programmes that educate children about healthy relationships and effective conflict resolution skills are important preventive measures.

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.

Unfortunately, too many mothers find it extremely difficult to protect their children from ongoing abuse as a result of their requirement to comply with contact orders. Women's Aid's campaign for safe contact is ongoing and emphasises a child's right to safe contact. For more information see the homepage of our website www.womensaid.org.uk and our briefings section "Children and Child Contact Related Briefings" .

- *"In relationships where there is domestic violence, children witness about three-quarters of the abusive incidents. About half the children in such families have themselves been badly hit or beaten. Sexual and emotional abuse are also more likely to happen in these families" (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2004).*
- *"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).*
- *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 5 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).*

Is domestic violence a crime?

Since domestic violence may comprise of a number of different behaviours and consequences, there is no single criminal offence of "domestic violence". Instead, there are several categories within the law that constitute a criminal offence that may also be defined as domestic violence.

Not all forms of domestic violence are illegal eg some forms of emotional violence, for example. However, these types of violence can also have a serious and lasting impact on a women or child's sense well-being and autonomy.

- *Criminal offences include: assault, threat to kill, wounding, attempting to choke, harassment, putting people in fear of violence, rape, sexual assault and exposure (Walby & Allen, 2004).*

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. They 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 their behaviour on someone else, the

relationship, their childhood, their ill health, or their alcohol or drug addiction is an abuser's way of avoiding personal responsibility for their behaviour.

Children, similar to the adult victim, 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 is often seen as a way of addressing the problem. However, there are two 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) and secondly, the approach itself assumes that the woman is in some way responsible or capable of altering the perpetrator's behaviour. Women's Aid therefore does not support the use of couple counselling or mediation in situations where domestic violence has occurred.

For more information about perpetrator programmes, we recommend you 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 DV on children"*
- *Also see "What is the cause of domestic violence?"*

Are women who experience domestic violence "helpless"?

"Learned helplessness" is an outdated concept in relation 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 eg 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 the helpline or a specialist domestic violence service, it is often an enormous relief for her to know that she is not alone ie. that there are many other women who have gone through very similar experiences.

- *Researchers Dobash and Dobash have this to say of the women who participated in their study: “The women in this study were also 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 & Dobash, 2000).*

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. The estimated total cost to the state is based on the following:*
 - *Criminal justice system - £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)*
 - *Health (NHS) - £1.2 billion (including mental health care estimated at an additional £176 million)*
 - *Social services - £0.25 billion*
 - *Housing - £0.16 billion*
 - *Civil legal services - £0.3billion**(Walby, 2004).*

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, of children moving schools and the impact this has on their education, excludes the cost of therapeutic and other support within the voluntary sector.

- *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?

- During the year 2003/04, we estimate that there were a total of 276 refuge organisations operating 478 residential properties for survivors of domestic violence. These properties provided women and children with an

estimated total of 2,755 rooms in shared houses and 435 flats, units or individual houses.

- We estimate that a total of **18,569 women and 23,084 children were accommodated** and supported by refuges during the year 2003/04.
- We estimate that a total of **17,094 women and 21,465 children were accommodated** by refuges during the year 2002/03.
- We estimate that there were a total of **8,007 women and 8,921 children** were provided with support, outreach and advocacy services by all domestic violence services on the Women's Aid 30th Birthday Census Day of 2 November 2004. Of these, a total of **2,914 women and 3,555 children** were also provided with accommodation.

A full report of the results of our Annual Survey 2002/03 and 2003/04 plus our 2004 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 refuges 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 Information on this website see our section on "If you or a friend need help": <http://www.womensaid.org.uk/help/index.htm>

Here is 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.

Refuge and Women's Aid Federation of England jointly run a Freephone 24 Hour National Domestic Violence Helpline for women and children experiencing domestic violence in 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 refuges by contacting one of the services listed in the National Network section of the website – see

http://www.womensaid.org.uk/network/regional_map.htm

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): [020 8539 9507](tel:02085399507)

Monday to Friday 9.00 am - 1.00 pm and 2.00 pm - 5.00 pm

Website: www.broken-rainbow.org.uk

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

The Broken Rainbow Helpline is part of the Broken Rainbow LGBT Domestic Violence Service (UK), a charity dedicated to changing the situation for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people experiencing domestic violence. The service manages the helpline, advises mainstream organisations and offers training and strategic support.

0845 064 6800 - Male Advice & Enquiry Line

If you are a man or you want to call on behalf of a man who is experiencing domestic violence, you can contact the Male Advice & Enquiry Line **0845 064 6800**.

0845 122 8609 - Respect Helpline

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 Phonenumber will specialise in providing services to male perpetrators, but will also be available for female perpetrators and those in same sex relationships.

Legal Rights

There are also a number of legal rights available to women and children. These are contained within both the criminal law and the civil law. For further information about these rights see the following policy sections on our website:

“Your Rights under Criminal Law”

“Your Rights under Civil Law”

For further information and briefings about children’s rights and child contact, see ***“Children and Child Contact Related Briefings”***

Housing Rights

Redirect to “Your Rights Under Housing Law”

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