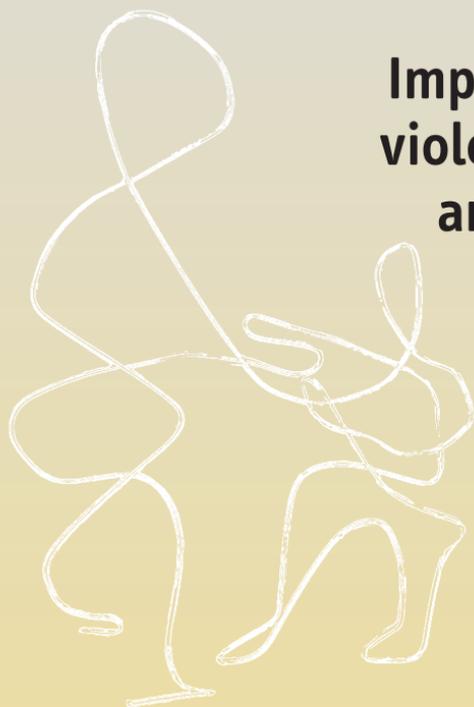




Impacts of domestic violence on children and young people



14

champions for children

Research Briefings for Councillors

Why is this issue important?

Domestic violence comprised 18 per cent of all violent incidents in England and Wales during 2010-11, and almost 25 per cent of young adults in the UK have witnessed domestic violence during their childhood.

Government in England and Wales define 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.'

Home Office, 2012

Exposure to domestic violence is considered a form of significant harm in the Adoption and Children Act 2002. The impacts on children differ by developmental stage and are cumulative with exposure over time.

The likelihood of repeat incidences and the complex nature of domestic violence causes a significant challenge for service provision. Nicky Stanley's 2011 review of research on domestic violence, commissioned by **research in practice**, shows a need for services that are responsive to the needs of children and mothers particularly addressing safety, maternal mental health, parenting, helping children to recover from trauma, and building resilience in both mothers and children.

Recognition of the impact of domestic violence and the significant financial cost to both private and public sectors is highlighted by the government's 2011 commitment to the provision of '£28m of stable Home Office funding for specialist domestic and sexual violence services over the next four years'.

This briefing concentrates on the key research messages regarding domestic violence to support Lead Members to ensure that the local authority fulfils its legal responsibilities in safeguarding children and young people.

Background

Prevalence, associations and risk factors

The prevalence of childhood exposure to domestic violence is significantly higher than that of direct forms of maltreatment. A survey by NSPCC found that 1 in 20 children and young people in the UK have experienced severe forms of domestic violence, and Stanley revealed children's involvement in domestic violence as 'intimate and active'.

Domestic violence is often complex and sustained: two-thirds of all domestic violence incidents in the 2008-2009 British Crime Survey involved repeat victimisation. Domestic violence occurs most often alongside social and economic disadvantage but can happen anywhere - being so 'deeply embedded in the pattern of family life in some communities [so] that victims, perpetrators and children may not recognise or define their experiences as domestic violence'.

Domestic violence is associated with pregnancy (particularly in younger women), violent communities, and alcohol and drugs; while victim's substance misuse problems may be an associated response. Animal abuse can also be an indicator. Men, and increasingly women, can be perpetrators, however men perpetrate much more frequently and use more serious violence. Women are therefore most likely to receive severe injuries, experience emotional harm and be the victims of sexual assaults in the context of domestic violence.

Service response

The police are often the first point of contact, but disclosure may also involve practitioners within criminal justice and specialist domestic violence agencies such as refuges; child protection practitioners; and those within private law intervention in the area of child contact. Professional responses are not always co-ordinated and have been described as 'life on three separate planets', each with a distinct professional standpoint and response.

Complex families and involvement from more than one agency, means that 'responding effectively to children's experience of domestic violence is a major challenge for those planning and delivering children's social care services'. The high volume of police notifications of domestic violence incidents in families with children has also been reported as overwhelming for some children's social care departments in England and Wales.

Key research messages

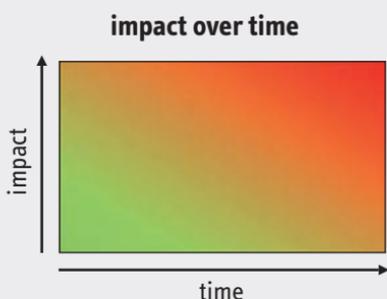
Impact

The impact of domestic violence on children and young people includes a range of emotional and behavioural responses which differ by developmental stage:

- **Infants:** delayed development, sleep disturbance, temper tantrums and distress
- **School-age children:** may develop conduct disorders and difficulties with their peers, and find it hard to concentrate
- **Adolescents:** depression, delinquency and aggression are common

Children and young people may also feel isolated and stigmatised or take on caring responsibilities. Those who also experience other forms of abuse and neglect have a high risk of psychological harm.

There is evidence that the impact is cumulative, with sustained exposure over time leading to the most severe impacts.



Circumstances where children are at greatest risk of experiencing domestic violence

- Women who are separated, and women on their own with the children are the groups at highest risk of experiencing domestic violence.
 - The post-separation period is particularly high-risk.
 - Contact meetings between children and their father can provide a context for domestic violence to continue.
- Women on low incomes, particularly less than £10,000, are at higher risk of experiencing domestic abuse.
- Poor maternal mental health increases the likelihood of harm for children exposed to domestic violence.

Reducing impacts in children and young people: Resilience

Resilience (achieving normal development in the face of considerable adversity) helps to protect children and young people. Research found over one-third of children who had experienced domestic violence were doing at least as well as their peers. Understanding resilience is therefore key to targeting resources effectively.

A strong sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy can promote and help children attribute responsibility for the violence to others.

Having an adult (usually the mother) who provides consistent support contributes to resilience, and friendships offer vital social support. Poor maternal mental health and particularly levels of depression are associated with domestic violence and these problems impact on parenting. Consequently, mothers' mental health is a key factor mediating on the impact of domestic violence on children and young people. Providing support to mothers is therefore crucial in order to protect children. US studies suggest that it is the caregiver's depression, family functioning and general levels of hostile and aggressive behaviour in the family which impact on children's health and behaviour.

Interventions and support that can protect children from the experience of domestic violence, facilitate adaptation and promote recovery are vital. Offering opportunities to participate in activities that develop confidence and confirm self-esteem such as membership of local clubs, positive friendships, stability of schooling and a supportive relationship with a caring adult therefore build resilience in children and young people.

Linking mothers and children into supportive community and social networks should be a principal objective of intervention to reduce isolation, this may be a particular problem for homeless and disabled women.

Key messages for policy and practice

Prevention and screening

Women are unlikely to disclose domestic violence unless asked directly, and thus screening in different settings (GPs, health visitors, social care) has proved effective. Practitioners who work with young people should ask about violence in intimate peer relationships, and relaxing the timeframe for initial assessments may make it easier for social workers to engage with abusive fathers. Lead Members can therefore support such methods to promote early identification, increase the effectiveness of services and ensure there are systems in place for effective co-ordination.

Interventions with mothers and children

The quality of mothers' parenting can recover in the absence of domestic violence, and so effective, targeted interventions should be supported.

Strong US evidence supports the value of advocacy services to help mothers access social and community resources and re-build independent lives. Short to medium-term crisis-focused support is provided to women in England and Wales by Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs). Early evaluation showed abuse ceased during the support period for 57 per cent of women, and thus the availability of IDVAs and their safety planning approaches should be considered within authorities. However, where domestic violence occurs alongside other long-term problems such as mental health needs, longer interventions are needed.

There is also robust evidence to support the effectiveness of parallel interventions for mothers and children. These programmes, which develop mothers' understanding and responsiveness to children's experience of domestic violence while strengthening children's self-esteem, are being introduced in some areas in England and Wales.

Perpetrator programmes

Many perpetrators struggle to accept the impact of violence on their children; interventions should address this. There is evidence for the effectiveness of perpetrator programmes in reducing re-offending rates, many are led by the voluntary sector in the UK and have the potential to increase children's safety. Programme intensity rather than length should be the focus, and follow-up interventions and the development of methods for reinforcing and sustaining behaviour change should be considered.

Overall effectiveness and value for money

- Targeted, longer-term interventions from social workers are required for families experiencing domestic violence.
- An inadequate pattern of repeated assessments or short-term interventions occurs when separation is the primary goal of intervention.
- Since domestic violence frequently occurs in separated families as well as in families that choose to stay together, intervention should focus on changing abusive behaviour, developing parents' awareness of the impact of domestic violence on children and supporting children and young people.

Multi-agency working

Increasing awareness of the impact of domestic violence across services, along with inter-agency training in screening and clear referral protocols, would support routine enquiry and promote disclosure within different settings.

Increasing regular and sustained communication between children's social care and specialist domestic violence services and the police, rather than confining it to formal settings (eg, case conferences) could be particularly helpful to both information transfer between agencies and for families to access support. Co-location, interagency meetings and integrated teams can all provide an effective means for agencies to share information as part of the process of filtering referrals and assessing risk.

Policy and guidance regarding contact

Contact often provides a context for domestic violence, and so a hierarchy of priorities should inform decisions about contact, and contact should not be presumed by the courts. Practitioners must establish and respect children's views regarding contact.

Consistent communication of information on the perpetrator's criminal history would assist identification of vulnerable children and young people and their associated needs.

The provision of high quality contact services with trained staff would contribute to making contact safer for mothers and children.

Key steps to developing a responsive service

Commissioning

- 1 Are senior managers across all services clear about service pathways and early intervention support available to families (in order to link families to these services effectively)?
- 2 Are there programmes for perpetrators in your area that address their role as fathers (to help reduce men's violence and increase their awareness of its impact on children)?
- 3 Are there parallel interventions available for both mothers and children that develop mothers' understanding and responsiveness to children's experience of domestic violence, while strengthening children's self-esteem (a means of building resilience and promoting recovery)?

Developing interagency collaboration

- 4 What mechanisms can be identified for increasing ongoing communication with both specialist domestic violence services and the police?
- 5 Have co-location schemes, that allow children's social care and other agencies such as the police to share the information required to assess risk, been developed in your area?
- 6 To what extent does children's social care collaborate with adult mental health services and CAMHS (to increase their sensitivity to domestic violence and its impact on children and to develop therapeutic interventions for mothers and children)?
- 7 Have systems for collaboration been developed with practitioners in an 'intermediate' position, such as school mentors, who offer a means of intervening with young people experiencing violence in their relationships?
- 8 Is there close collaboration with refuges, and does the collaboration aim to incorporate the work undertaken with children into the wider assessments of children's needs?

Strengthening practice

- 9 Are practitioners skilled in talking directly to children about domestic violence and listening to and validating their accounts?
- 10 Do those who work with adolescents (particularly looked after children and care leavers) address their peer relationships and routinely ask about their experiences of domestic violence in their own and their parents' relationships?
- 11 Is training in work with violent men available to practitioners and their managers?
- 12 Is there interagency training, and does it address variations in agency approaches and objectives in work with families experiencing domestic violence (to strengthen collaboration)?

Films about domestic violence produced by **research in practice**:

Parent abuse: a hidden form of family violence

Social work with violent men

Domestic violence: Prevalence and interventions

Domestic violence: Perpetrators

Domestic violence: The voice and experience of children

Violence in young people's relationships: research findings and messages for practice

All available to view at www.rip.org.uk/impacts_of_dv

A 12-week consultation for a national disclosure scheme (regarding disclosure of an individual's history of domestic violence to a new partner) was conducted by the Home Office during 2011/early 2012 in England and Wales. A summary of responses will be published on the Home Office website www.homeoffice.gov.uk

Meeting the Needs of Children Living with Domestic Violence in London. Refuge and NSPCC report (Radford et al 2011).

Research report <http://refuge.org.uk/files/onlineDVLondon.pdf>

and executive summary <http://refuge.org.uk/files/onlineDVExecSum.pdf>

Expected in 2014: Public health guidance on the prevention and reduction of domestic violence between intimate partners. The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) and the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE)

Chaplin R, Flatley J and Smith K, eds. (2011) *Crime in England and Wales 2010/11: Findings from the British Crime Survey and police recorded crime*. London: Home Office

Radford L, Aitken R, Miller P, Ellis J, Roberts J and Firkic A (2011) *Meeting the needs of children living with domestic violence in London*: Refuge/NSPCC Research Report available online at <http://refuge.org.uk/files/onlineDVLondon.pdf>

Stanley N (2011) *Children Experiencing Domestic Violence: Research Review* Dartington: **research in practice** www.rip.org.uk/research-reviews

about the 'champions for children' series

This series of research briefings for councillors with responsibility for children and family services aims to summarise key research findings, good practice and policy developments to help you to improve outcomes for children and families in need by ensuring that adequate and effective services are provided. Each briefing includes prompts for questions you might want to ask your officers.

See our website for more information and links to references and resources

www.rip.org.uk/champions

© research in practice March 2012

research in practice
Social Justice Programme
The Granary
Dartington Hall
Totnes
Devon TQ9 6EE

t: 01803 867692

e: ask@rip.org.uk

Thanks

We are grateful to councillors Liz Green and Chris Lewis and to Nicky Stanley for their comments on the draft text for this briefing.

Written by Kelly Macrae, based on the research review by Nicky Stanley (2011)

research in practice is a Department of The Dartington Hall Trust, a registered charity. Company No. 1485560 Charity No.279756