



From Victim
to Survivor:
Domestic abuse in
21st Century London



Hestia

Hestia is a charity working across London with adults and children in crisis. Hestia's vision is to empower people and change lives. We do this in partnership with our service users focusing on recovery and building new lives. We listen closely to the experiences and aspirations of our service users and all our work is driven by this.

Hestia is the largest specialist provider of domestic abuse refuges in London, running 34 safe houses across 12 London boroughs, assisting 664 women and their children every day. We also support victims in the community through our Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy (IDVA) and Outreach programme. In 2015-16 we supported more than 3,500 women and children within our domestic abuse services.

We also provide accommodation and advocacy support to victims of human trafficking across London. Our Independent Domestic and Sexual Violence Advocates (ISVA) support women and men at high risk of abuse, both in the community and in safe houses.

We run a variety of other services for people across London – delivering supported housing, registered care, community outreach services, and day centers. We offer practical support to people with mental health needs, ex-offenders and young people; we help them into education, volunteering, training and employment.

Introduction

Hestia's policy work aims to give a voice to those who use our services in order to inform the work of policy makers and commissioners. In 2012 Hestia published a research report entitled 'From Victim to Survivor', which explored the experience of domestic abuse survivors in London. This report updates that research it focuses on the experience of victims of domestic abuse and draws attention to the courage and resilience demanded in order to recovery from the trauma of abuse. Services could be organized differently in order to promote recovery and the rebuilding of lives and this report draws our attention to what victims and survivors tell us about the required improvements and the current challenges. They tell us that:

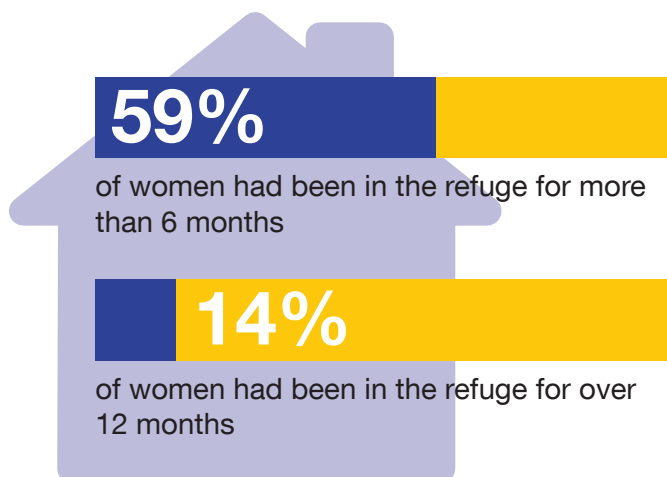
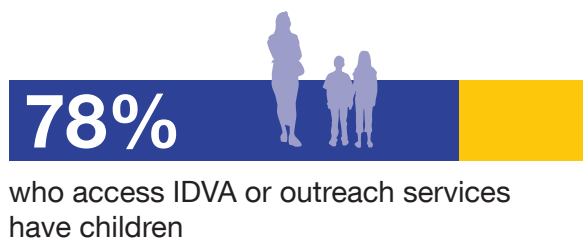
- 1 Increased public awareness is required to tackle domestic abuse early.**
- 2 Economic empowerment is central to addressing domestic abuse.**
- 3 Addressing domestic abuse needs to be a priority in health and wellbeing strategies and related service provision.**
- 4 While service users express high levels of satisfaction in the support and response of police that problems with access to Legal Aid prevents women seeking redress.**
- 5 Above all else difficulties in access to housing prevent victims of domestic abuse from rebuilding their lives.**
- 6 Children are the forgotten victims of domestic abuse and service responses are inadequate.**
- 7 Victims are abused through the use of smart technologies and more awareness is needed.**

The Context

London: The Statistics

Domestic abuse is increasing year on year in London. In the year to March 2016 there were over 148,000 incidents which were 7,100 more than compared to March 2015. However, domestic abuse remains a severely underreported crime. MOPAC (2016) estimates that the police are unaware of 81% of domestic abuse victims nationally.

The picture is varied across the capital. Barking and Dagenham has the highest rate for domestic violence offences while Richmond has the lowest with 28 and 11 incidents respectively incidents per 1,000 population.



Methodology

Our staff and service users working together identified the key research areas through focus group and a small survey. From this we developed 2 questionnaires, one for our refuge services and a second for our community based IDVA and outreach services. Questions focused on Finance, Health and Well-being, Housing, Children, Technology, Access to services and Legal support. The questionnaire was completed by 206 women who had experienced domestic abuse. 147 women were from our refuge services and 59 from our community based services. Service user group consultations also took place gain a more in depth understanding of issues that had arisen from the questionnaires. These meetings took place at 3 different refuges, involving a total of 16 residents.



Analysis:

The London experience of domestic abuse victims

1. Access to services

“ *The abuse went on for years and on many occasions I feared for my life. If I had known about refuges I could have left before.* ”
– Mirta Ealing Refuge

Main Conclusion: Increased public awareness is essential to tackle domestic abuse early.

1.1 One of the main barriers to escaping abusive relationships is the lack of knowledge of available support services. 63% of Hestia residents who responded to the survey were unaware that refuges existed before being referred to one.

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65% of our sample surveyed came to the refuge from within the London area – albeit some from a different borough.

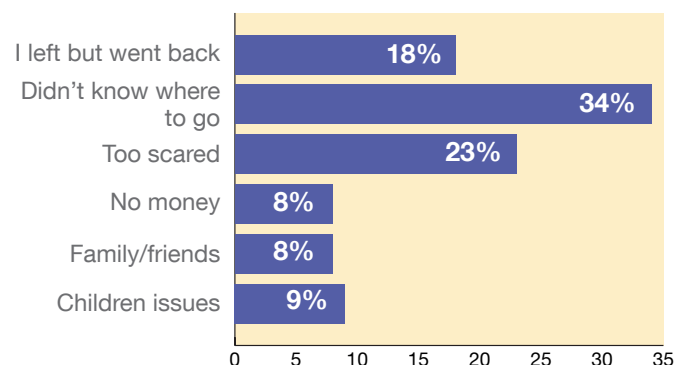
1.2 34% of women accessed services with the support of specialist domestic abuse agencies. The police was the second largest referring agency making 16% of all referrals. They were followed by Social Services (13.5%) and the National Domestic Violence Helpline (11.5%).

1.3 Documentation is an issue for some women moving into a refuge. Less than half of women entering the refuge were able to bring documentation that would have enabled them to access financial support. This delays

their financial independence, exacerbated the family struggle and may cause many women to consider returning to the abusive relationship. 3% of women arrived without any documentation.

1.4 Leaving an abusive relationship can be a difficult decision. 80% of service users in refuges thought about leaving their partner before they did. 18% of those had left and gone back, 34% did not know where to go, 23% were too frightened and 25% delayed for reasons related to children, money and family.

Reasons why women in refuges who thought about leaving their partner did not do it before



In outreach services 7% of women still lived with the perpetrator.

1.5 71% of women with pets had to leave them behind and this delayed their escape.

2. Children

Main Conclusion: Children are the forgotten victims of domestic abuse and service responses are inadequate.

The effects of domestic abuse on children have historically been ignored. The scale of the problem is overwhelming.

950,000 children are affected by domestic violence, either directly as victims of violence, or indirectly in terms of witnessing violence (British Crime Survey, 2009ⁱ). A quarter of the children living with high-risk domestic abuse are under 3 years old and the average length of an abusive relationship before receiving help is 2.7 yearsⁱⁱ. Many of these children have therefore lived much of their life around severe parental abuse. The NSPCC tells us those 39,000 babies under 1 year old lived in households affected by domestic violence. (NSPCC, 2012).

- 2.1** 16% of mothers did not have their children living with them in the refuge. All mothers in outreach services had their children with them. 22 70% of women also said that their children's safety was the reason why they did eventually leave although 63% of women cited the impact on their children as a barrier to leaving an abusive relationship earlier.
- 2.2** 20% of mothers were scared to approach social services for support even if they had no previous involvement with them.
- 2.3** 32% of mothers found it difficult to find a school place after fleeing abuse. 21% of mothers living in a refuge had to wait 3-4 weeks before their child was accepted into a school and 17% of women have to wait more than 4 weeks. Typically the wait was longer for secondary school places.

1 in 5

mothers were scared of Social Services, even if they had never been in contact



- 2.4** 85% of mothers in our survey stated that there was no child contact at all with the perpetrator, and many we spoke to in our service user consultations were torn between the importance of the child maintaining a relationship with their father and the risk of abuse to the mother or child.

15% of the women in refuges have child contact with their perpetrator. Of the women who have child contact 50% were required to do so by the Family Courts.

- 2.5** The psychological impact of domestic abuse can have long lasting effects on children. However 90% of children leave refuges without accessing any counselling support or mental health intervention. In many cases, children are offered spaces after leaving the refuge, but these opportunities are frequently lost if the family has had to relocate.



of children leave refuges without accessing any form of formal counselling

ⁱ British Crime Survey (2008/9)

ⁱⁱ NSPCC (2012) Child abuse and neglect in the UK today

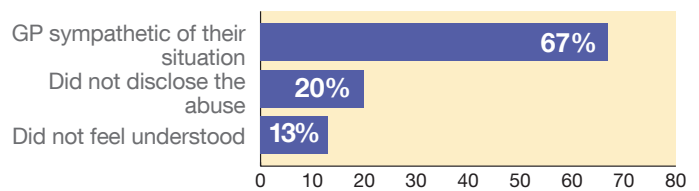
3. Health and Wellbeing

Main Conclusion: Addressing domestic abuse needs to be a priority in health and wellbeing strategies and service provision.

- 3.1 68% of women had no access to counseling. If available, 70% of those with no access would take it up. Domestic violence can result in self-harm and attempted suicide. One-third of women attending emergency departments for self-harm were domestic violence survivorsⁱⁱⁱ. One-third of all female suicide attempts can be attributed to current or past experience of domestic violence (Stark & Flitcraft, Mullender 1996^{iv}).
- 3.2 67% of women felt that their GP did understand their situation in relation to domestic abuse while 20% did not feel able to disclose the abuse.

- 3.3 Loneliness has been revealed as a problem for refuge residents. 12% of women in the refuges said they had no friends to support them.
- 3.4 31% women in refuges said travel costs stop them from going out and 66% would feel less isolated if travel was more affordable. Access to fare discounts have limited use (only trams and buses) and are not available for the first 3 months of a JSA claim.

Women feeling understood by their doctor in relation to the domestic violence they had experienced



4. Personal Finance

“ If he was contacted for money, he would think I was only doing it to annoy him not because we were desperate. – Claire, Tower Hamlets Refuge

Main Conclusion: Economic empowerment is key to addressing domestic abuse.

- 4.1 Registration and the transfer of address details with the Job Centre proved difficult – 39% of refuge claimants waited over 4 weeks to receive a first payment. Interim financial support from Local Authority Assistance Schemes can be an uncertain and time consuming. 78% of women and children arrive at the refuge with no money and this delay adds unnecessary stress. 43% of women relied on financial help from friends and

family. The refuge used their own resources to support 5% of women.

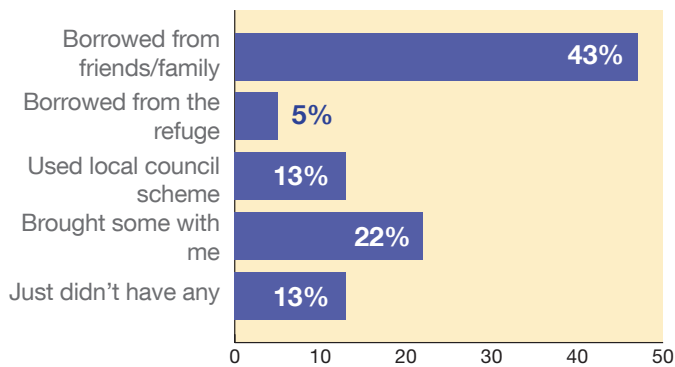
- 4.2 Only 11% of Job Seeker Allowance claimants were informed by the job centre that they are eligible to apply for up to 13 weeks of an easement that allows a brief delay in looking for work due to the trauma of domestic abuse.
- 4.3 84% of the women surveyed did not receive any form of child maintenance from the father of their children. For 20% of single mothers child maintenance lifts them and their children out of poverty (Nuffield Foundation, 2012^v).

ⁱⁱⁱ (British Medical Association 1998)

^{iv} Stark and Flitcraft (1996) Women at risk: Domestic Violence and Women’s Health (London: Sage); Mullender, Audrey (1996) Rethinking domestic violence: The Social Work and Probation response London: Routledge

^v ‘Kids aren’t free’ Nuffield Foundation 2012

Ways that woman in refuge coped financially till they were able to claim benefits



Eight out of ten

of the women we surveyed did not receive any form of financial support from the father of their child/ren



Parents are allowed to keep all maintenance received without a subsequent reduction in their state benefits and consequently this is unlikely to be a factor in the low take up from our women.

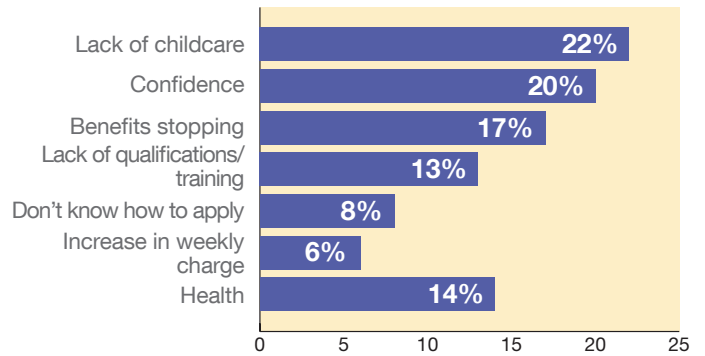
- 4.4** 17% of women had issues transferring child benefit from the perpetrators name to their own, therefore delaying payment.
- 4.5** 28% of respondents gave up work directly as a result of fleeing abuse – primarily for safety reasons.



of our service users had been required to give up work as a result of moving to a refuge.

- 4.6** 83% of women in refuges want to take up employment or volunteering. They were deterred by lack of affordable childcare (22%), confidence (20%), benefits stopping (23%), lack of qualifications (13%), health issues (14%) while 8% did not know how to apply.

What stops women in refuges to look for work or employment



- 4.7** 26% of women in outreach services have their partner's debt in their name.
- 4.8** 23% of women in refuges rely on food banks to survive.
- 4.9** 84% of women did not know anything about how the change to Universal Credit might affect them.



of women in refuges felt that employment or volunteering would benefit them.



of women in outreach services who have their partners' debt in their name.

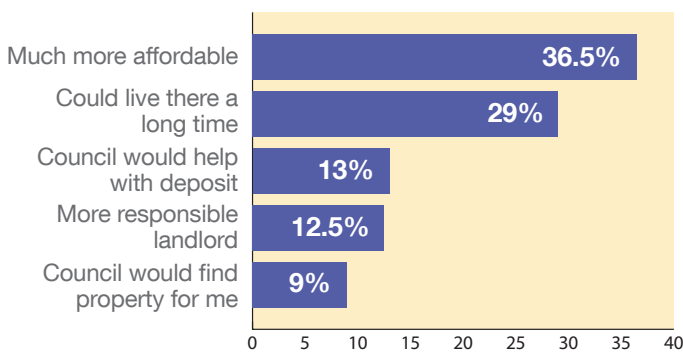
5. Housing

“ I have just had a baby – I would be petrified to go into bed and breakfast accommodation. – Lorraine, Ealing Refuge

Main Conclusion: Difficulties in access to housing prevents victims of domestic abuse from rebuilding their lives.

- 5.1** Finding safe, secure and affordable accommodation remains a struggle for victims of domestic abuse. It was the most common obstacle to rebuilding their lives for our service users.
- 5.2** Women leaving refuges expressed a strong preference for social housing over private sector renting.

Why did victims prefer social to private rented housing



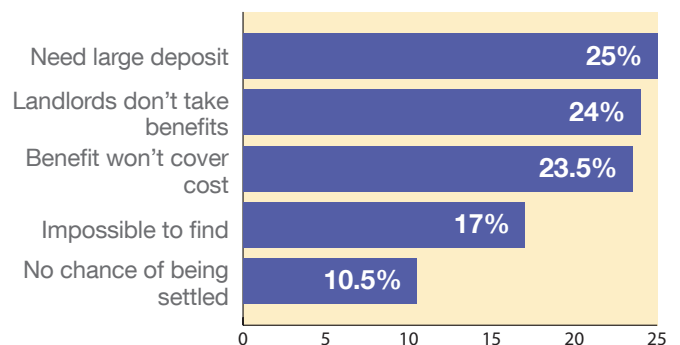
- 5.3** 44% thought that Local Authority housing officers explained options clearly; 22% were confused by what was said and 34% felt that they were given no choice by them. Failure to disclose elements of the abuse could lead to women not being deemed as homeless. However, 48% were not offered a private room for the meeting. Overall, only 30% of victims had a positive experience regarding their engagement with housing departments. 16% described themselves as having been made to feel worthless.

- 5.4** 73% of women using our DV outreach services do not feel safe in their home. 56% of women using our DV outreach services were not offered a sanctuary scheme by the housing team. This could be because the service is not available within the borough. However, this is an option that could help some women stay safely within their houses.

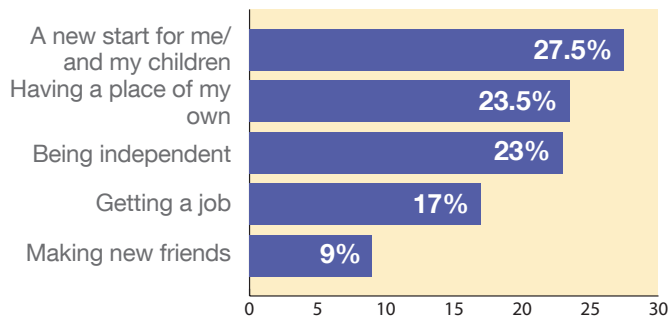
- 5.5** The House of Lords (2009) ruled that women living in refuges, having fled domestic violence, do not have any accommodation which it is reasonable to continue to occupy. As a result, they are “homeless” within the statutory definition of homelessness and entitled to the benefit of homelessness assistance from local housing authorities. Despite this ruling, 62% of women experienced that housing departments see them as safe because they were in a refuge and not in urgent need.

- 5.6** The shortage of social housing means that many women will leave the refuge and move to private rented housing. However, 24% encountered landlords who don’t take benefits while 25% require large deposits 23.5% said their benefits won’t cover the housing costs. 17% said it had been impossible to find a private sector tenancy.

Difficulties faced by women to move into private accommodation



Reasons why women want to be re-housed



5.7 One housing option is bed and breakfast accommodation. 49.5% of our service users say they would feel scared and unsafe in a B&B; 25% wouldn't mind as they see it a roof over their head; 13% think it would put their recovery process back by months; 6.5% would be happy and 6% would see no difference.

34%



of women felt that they were given no choice by the housing options officer

48%



were not offered a private room for their housing options interview

6. Legal

Main Finding: Service users express high levels of satisfaction in the support and response of police. Access to Legal Aid prevents women seeking redress.

6.1 74% of women surveyed reported the abuse to the police. The treatment they received from the police throughout the referral process was overwhelmingly positive. 45% said that they were 'helpful', 27.5% said they were 'friendly' and 12.5% said they 'really cared'. 10% said they were 'okay', 5% said they 'made me feel

16%



described themselves as having been made to feel worthless by their housing options team



62%

of women experienced that housing departments viewed them as safe and not as homeless because they were in a refuge



73%

of women in outreach do not feel safe in their home



56%

of women were not offered a sanctuary scheme

guilty' and no-one opted to describe them as 'terrible' or 'they didn't care'.

6.2 Asked if they have or would consider prosecuting their ex-partner. 43% of our service users answered 'yes' with 52% stating that they would not, and 5% being unsure.

The main reasons given were 'it would be too upsetting' (39%), 'I want to forget about it' (34%), 'Pressure from families' (13%) and 'I'm told there is no evidence' (11%). 3% of respondents replied with 'other'.

- 6.3** 60% of service users said they would feel safer with an injunction. This number was higher within outreach services where 76% would feel safer. In the focus groups, women in refuges described a lack of confidence in the power of an injunction to protect them.
- 6.4** 67.5% of domestic abuse victims have never attended court for domestic abuse related offences. 83% of victims that have attended court have received support. 35% of them felt scared and 20% worried about seeing their ex-partner. 12% were satisfied that justice was being done.
- 6.5** Only 36% of our service users had the services of a solicitor. In terms of legal aid, 20% of women in refuges had issues accessing it whilst this number increases significantly to 41% in outreach services.



7. Technology

“It was terrifying when we cut open a teddy bear my husband had given our daughter. It had a hidden camera. He could see everything we were up to”. – Jenny, Hammersmith Refuge

Main Conclusion: Victims are abused through the use of smart technologies and more awareness is needed.

The development smart technology is posing some difficult challenges for domestic abuse victims. Online abuse has become another way to stalk, harass and publicly humiliate.

- 7.1** Our data shows that 46% of service users have received abusive texts, 15% received abuse via Facebook posts and 8% stalked using apps. 8% of service users have been found by the perpetrator using the internet or their smart phone. Of these, 69% located them through a feature on the phone and 25% through a Facebook post.

- 7.2** 54 service users made a report about the online abuse – 47 to the police, 7 to their mobile phone provider and 2 to their internet provider. 77% felt listened to and supported, but in just 41% of cases were they able to stop the abuse.





A single donation to Hestia could:

- £10 provide bedding and essential items for a family fleeing domestic violence arriving at our safe house with nothing but the clothes on their back.
- £30 pay for a one to one session with a support worker to encourage a victim of domestic abuse to gain the skills and confidence needed to return to work.
- £90 pay for a family for three nights in one of our safe houses for victims of domestic abuse to receive the emotional and practical support they need to start to change their lives for the better.

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To donate visit www.hestia.org

For more information about our work, simply email our fundraising team at fundraising@hestia.org or write to us at:

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