

A link in the chain

The role of friends and family
in tackling domestic abuse



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**citizens
advice**

Contents

Summary	3
1. Introduction	10
1.1 What do we mean by domestic abuse?	
1.2 Who does it happen to?	
1.3 Harm and cost to individuals and society	
1.4 Our approach: minimising harm by considering friends and family	
1.5 Scope and focus	
2. Barriers to victims accessing specialist support	18
2.1 Not all victims recognise all abuse	
2.2 Victims who recognise abuse may not want to disclose	
2.3 Friends and family: the link in the chain?	
3. Friends, family and community: the importance of informal networks	26
3.1 Victims disclose to friends and family	
3.2 Emotional and practical support	
3.3 Informal networks can bridge the gap to specialists	
4. Barriers to effective support	30
4.1 Missing abuse	
4.2 Reluctance to ask	
4.3 First responses: getting it right?	
4.4 Ongoing support can take its toll	
5. Conclusion: supporting supporters	39
5.1 A civil society campaign: 'Talk About Abuse'	
5.2 Three questions for Government to include in their review	

Citizens Advice and domestic abuse

In a series of publications we explore the role of civil society in minimising domestic abuse. This report looks at the role of informal networks (friends, family, colleagues and neighbours) in recognising and supporting victims of domestic abuse.

We welcome the increasing political and national focus on challenging abuse through new laws, reviews of policy practice and funding commitments. The role of specialists - in the form of refuges, legal professionals and police, helplines or support services - is critical for many victims to leave abusive relationships and rebuild their lives. However most victims don't engage with these groups. We argue that to successfully minimise abuse, policy and practice must also consider the social context of abusive relationships.

We want to improve the support from the informal networks and frontline professionals who may be aware of abuse. And we consider how social and professional networks can help bridge the gap between victims and specialist support.

In considering the role of non-specialists, we don't seek to add additional burdens onto the public, or duties to frontline staff beyond their remit. By looking at the evidence and best practice, we consider how we can best support those who are already encountering abuse but lack consistent guidance or information about their role: not leaving a friend to feel guilty about not intervening or anxious about what to do; a housing official worried about an abusive partner returning to harass a tenant; an emergency doctor with concerns about the safety of discharging a patient.

Our focus on non-specialists doesn't detract from the critical importance of specialist domestic abuse organisations and advocates. Within this framing specialists may have a greater role to play, by both being a source that informal supporters can refer victims onto, but also by being available to advise and support these supporters. Our hope is that by mobilising civil society, victims' routes to specialist support is quicker and easier.

Citizens Advice is not, nor seeks to become, a specialist provider in this space. We aim to play a positive role in minimising domestic abuse by facilitating engagement and awareness amongst a cross-section of frontline staff, as well as friends and family, promoting the role of civil society in tackling the issue, and improving our own service delivery through training and selective enquiry in local Citizens Advice around the country. Through our public-facing campaign, we will promote the 'Talk About Abuse' framework, as well as the services that are already available, but are not always known about.

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Summary

Domestic abuse is a deep scar running through our society, and tackling it deserves to be a national priority. It is unacceptable that it is a common feature of many relationships: more than 1.5 million people experienced abuse from a partner in the last year alone; rising to almost 6 million who have been victimised as adults.¹ It can cause deep and lasting harm to victims, with repercussions continuing even after separation, and beyond the immediate family to friends, colleagues and communities. Harm can be physical and psychological, but detriment also can spill over into work and family life, homes and savings, credit rating and debt (Chapter 1).

'No one asked. No one asked me and I just didn't tell'²

Despite the harm abuse causes, victims struggle to acknowledge and disclose what's happening to them and seek support³ (Chapter 2). They face complex personal and practical barriers to admitting abuse and accessing help, as their lives are often intricately intertwined, in terms of emotions, networks and resources, with that of the perpetrator. Victims worry about implications of accessing services on their children, or assume they can only get help if they want to leave the relationship.⁴ Despite changing public attitudes, some people who have been subject to abuse feel stigmatised and so can be reluctant to admit and seek help, even to those close to them. Feelings of shame or blame aren't solely instilled by the perpetrator: in a recent survey of a cross-section of women, a third said they wouldn't want anyone to know if they were to be a victim of abuse.⁵

As individuals struggle to proactively seek help, many victims remain invisible to services, never accessing effective support. Abusive relationships escalate, going unrecognised and undiscussed, sometimes for years.⁶ Victims can become increasingly isolated, making the gap to trained specialist services (helplines, refuges, police or health professionals) yawn large.

Friends and family can be a key link in the chain to leaving abuse behind, as these are the individuals most likely to be aware of abuse early on. Informal networks can offer help by encouraging victims to reach out to specialist services or the police

¹ Crime Survey of England and Wales 2013/14 (2015). Estimated numbers of victims of intimate violence in the last year, by headline categories

² Lutenbacher, M., Cohen, A., & Mitzel, J (2003) Do we really help? Perspectives of abused women. *Public Health Nursing*, 20. 56-64.

³ We use the terms 'victims' and 'perpetrators' throughout, but do not mean to imply that those who experience abuse should be reduced to 'victim' status and even that those who commit abuse should not be solely understood as 'perpetrators.'

⁴ SafeLives (2015) Getting it right first time.

⁵ YouGov poll of 2,244 women, carried out 3-5 Sept. 2014, carried out on behalf of refuge. <http://www.refuge.org.uk/2014/09/17/loose-women-and-refuge-launch-domestic-violence-campaign/>

⁶ SafeLives (2015) Getting it right first time.

(acting as a conduit), or by offering practical and emotional aid themselves (supporter), from bolstering self-esteem to providing somewhere to stay (Chapter 3).

To minimise abuse we must look beyond sets of binary relationships, between two partners, a victim and specialist, or perpetrator and the justice system.

Policy-makers and practitioners need to consider the social context that abusive relationships exist in.

Informal networks deserve greater attention, because of the positive role they can play. But also because they are the ecosystem abuse exists in. Despite best intentions, social groups can also (unwittingly) sustain abuse. Those close to a victim can create an environment that may encourage or discourage a victim from taking steps to leave a relationship. This may be active or passive, explicit or tacit, but the attitude and engagement (or lack there of) from social ties, send signals both to the victim and to the perpetrator.⁷ Without others picking up on warning signs, creating a 'disclosing environment', or actively asking, victims can struggle to tell anyone about the abuse and seek help.

'I stayed [because] no-one helped me leave'⁸

Despite caring deeply about a victim, social networks aren't always best equipped to offer support (Chapter 4). As a society we struggle to recognise abuse, particularly when it doesn't fit a stereotype of a powerful, male perpetrator inflicting physical violence on a vulnerable, female victim. Where abuse doesn't fit this mould - where people are friends with both parties, where abuse is emotional, or bound up with mental health issues, where the perpetrator is repentant, kind, funny or self-assured, where the victim is successful and confident in public, where the couple are no longer together, or casually dating, or the same sex - we may be less quick to spot and challenge abuse.

Even if aware of abuse, supporters may be unsure whether it is appropriate to engage. It's a sensitive subject, and people are understandably worried about doing the wrong thing or exacerbating the problem. Many may feel unable to start such a difficult conversation. If abuse is ongoing, those close to a victim may be frustrated by them remaining in an abusive relationship, struggling to understand why they won't leave; or refuse to accept the possibility of someone they know or care about perpetrating abuse. Where victims face dismissal or even blame following disclosure, this can shut down their willingness to disclose further or seek help.⁹ The first response is therefore critical.

⁷ Klein, R (2014) Responding to Intimate Violence Against Women, The Role of Informal Networks. Cambridge University Press

⁸ Quote taken from Twitter #WhyIStayed discussion

⁹ Klein R (2014) Responding to Intimate Violence against Women: The Role of Informal Networks Cambridge University Press

“Heads turned in the other direction. I don’t blame them. I forgive them. They were scared too”¹⁰

Despite the importance of informal networks in impeding or facilitating abuse, being likely to be the first point of disclosure, their role is given little consideration in research or policy development. Without detracting attention from the importance of intensive and specialist services for victims of domestic abuse (in the form of refuges, Independent Domestic Violence Advocates [IDVAs] or advocacy in the justice system), Citizens Advice wants to improve the support available from a range of sources. We need to better equip informal networks - the community in which the relationship takes place - to recognise warning signs, have confidence to ask, offer appropriate support and be able to refer on to experts (Chapter 5).¹¹

This report suggests how can we cultivate a climate where disclosure comes earlier on. By looking at the evidence and best practice, we consider how we can make friends, family and the wider community more aware of the role they could have in facilitating or shutting down opportunities for victims to disclose, or seek remedy or redress. And we present ideas for government and third sector to best support those supporters, those who are already encountering abuse, but lack consistent guidance or information about their role.

By broadening the range of people who might help open the door to escape from abuse, we hope this will in turn reduce the number of cases which escalate to profound and chronic harm, major state intervention, or in the worse cases, end in preventable death. This can be achieved partly by providing individuals with advice and information which equips them to recognise the signs of abuse, broach the topic safely, and respond appropriately. But it also relies on there being a clear and accessible route to specialist support.

This report draws on new primary evidence as well as secondary literature to discuss the reality and extent of domestic abuse in our society, explore the barriers to help-seeking, particularly around lack of recognition of non-physical abuse, before moving on to explore the role of informal networks in tackling this issue.

A civil society campaign: ‘Talk About Abuse’

We set out the evidence and argue for the need for a public-facing campaign about domestic abuse. Rather than targeting the victim or perpetrator, there is space for a civil campaign which addresses friends and family, those who may have worries about a relationship, but lack confidence or a framework with which to engage. Alongside this publication, Citizens Advice have developed materials to kick-start a national campaign, which include steps to encourage society to safely and appropriately ‘Talk About Abuse’ (Chapter 5). These resources are freely available,

¹⁰ Quote taken from Twitter #WhyIStayed discussion

¹¹ This model doesn’t minimise the role for specialists. Indeed, the hope would be for a greater number of people contacting specialist services, earlier on in any abusive relationship.

and we welcome and encourage others in society - community and faith groups, employers, hairdressers, pubs, music venues, sports teams - to consider displaying these resources. More fundamentally, we encourage people to consider those close to them, and if they have concerns, to safely ask about abuse, using the clear framework we have developed, with input from specialists.

Our 'Talk About Abuse' campaign approaches the problem of abuse by harnessing the will and resources available in civil society, rather than seeing this as an issue which requires a government-led policy lever. That said, there is a core role for government if they are to minimise abuse, earlier on in relationships.

The Chancellor has committed to review how to provide sustainable funding for refuges and other vital specialist services. The Welsh Government are also reviewing their specialist services in light of the recent enactment of the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015. This review is much needed and should be considered in the context of a wide range of community support mechanisms, like IDVA and outreach services. The review remit includes consideration of what could prevent the need for individuals needing refuge provision. We recommend the government structures the review to answer three questions, which are vital to reduce abuse escalating in relationships (Chapter 5):

Q1: How can the public better recognise non-physical abuse in their or each others' relationships?

'But they never hit me'

Across the last four decades, consecutive Governments have taken steps to articulate and criminalise domestic abuse. As our understanding of abuse has grown, so the Government's focus has broadened, from debates in the 1970s about men being violent to their wives, through to the introduction of a new offence to criminalise coercive or controlling domestic abuse this year. Other changes - from making explicit that harm can be caused from a 'pattern' of behaviours as well as discrete incidents, that it can occur between family members as well as couples, between former partners as well as current, and regardless of gender or sexuality - expanded the definition further.

Each of these iterations is welcome. Every development better reflects the realities of abuse, is more inclusive, and illuminates how difficult it can be for a victim to seek help or leave a relationship. Yet, a broad definition of abuse in the Home Office won't be effective in preventing, minimising or responding to perpetrators, unless it has meaning for real people - unless this definition equips people to spot and challenge abuse.

Society is unsure what constitutes coercive or controlling behaviours, and

lack confidence in recognising domestic abuse: we lack a working definition of abuse. As part of the review, the UK government should work with researchers, specialists and the media, as well as devolved governments, to promote and illustrate a working account of abuse that the public can recognise, building on their successful campaign targeted at young people, and current campaigns by the Welsh government. This should broaden beyond stereotypical presentations of physical abuse, to accounts which resonate with people who are actually experiencing or witnessing abuse. Part of this should promote early signs of abuse, and examples of coercive controlling behaviours.

Q2: What needs amending to ensure all different parts of policy and society share a common, consistent and applicable account of abuse?

‘Where can I go and what will I live on?’

We need a common description of abuse that is applied across government (local, regional and national), and is understood by relevant services providers in both the public and private sphere. As part of the review the UK government should engage with civil society institutions, from charities to banks, that have a role to play in recognising and responding to this broader account of domestic abuse. There may be useful lessons to learn from the Welsh Government.

There needs to be consistency across different policy areas, and parts of civil society, about domestic abuse, and what support or safeguards are available for victims.

- Commitments from different government departments, affecting housing, benefits and legal aid, for example, must share a consistent depiction of abuse.
- Evidence requirements for demonstrating abuse should be common across different departments, and these should be reasonable and accessible for any victim, to ensure support materialises on the ground.
- Legal aid must be available in practice; currently too many victims struggle to meet the evidence requirements or pay financial contributions required.
- Safe and appropriate housing should be easily available: some victims are being offered unsafe accommodation or deemed voluntarily homeless.
- Those leaving abuse must be exempted from the Housing Benefit under 21 restriction and the two child restriction proposed for tax credits, just as they are from the single household Universal Credit payment requirement.
- Local authority Housing Benefit staff and HMRC tax credit staff are trained to understand what domestic abuse is and where the exemptions apply.

Members of the review should engage with cross-section of different actors,

outside government as well as within, to ensure that other policy areas are equipped to recognise and respond to abuse. If financial abuse, for example, is to be addressed, there needs to be collaboration with creditors and banks (including local authorities and HMRC) to develop common frameworks for recognising and responding to this form of abuse.

Q3: How can anybody who has concerns about abuse easily access the information, guidance or support they need?

'I needed help but didn't know how to access any or if there was any available to me'

In England there is a complex map of information and support available around domestic abuse. Even amongst our Citizens Advice network - designed for information and referral - we have struggled to map what resources are available for whom, and how to access them.

There's a good reason specialists offer tailored services to specific groups: female victims may only feel safe amongst other women; LGBT victims may worry about having to 'out' themselves; male victims can fear stigma about being a victim; and BAMER victims may have specific cultural or language needs. Local, specialist and tailored services can minimise barriers to seeking help, so there can't be a one-size-fits-all model for specialist provision.

That said, the user journey needs to be improved to ensure members of the public are able to find and access support - quickly and intuitively - whoever they are, and whatever type of abuse they may be worried about. There are nationally-funded helplines, but they are unable to answer all calls, have different opening hours, and are tailored for different audiences. Anyone should be able to easily be able to understand what counts as abuse, and whether it is a criminal offence, through to the steps of applying for legal aid or collecting evidence.

As the UK government considers a much needed sustainable funding model for specialist services, they should also apportion funds for (further) accessible digital services around abuse. Web chat for information and support should be considered across the UK (with appropriate safety considerations). The option of asking questions or discussing a relationship online, rather than voice-to-voice, or face-to-face, may make it easier for people to seek help sooner, and this functionality should be considered in any case to free up helplines and more intensive services for those who wish or need to use them.

The review should consider whether investing in a digital 'front door' for information and advice that is well designed and inclusive¹² (but with clear signposting to specialist services for particular groups) could help support victims and friends and family with understanding their options, their risks and where they can - confidentially - get further support. While for many issues, users simply google their question to find answers (making Google the 'homepage' for most sites), given the sensitivity of domestic abuse, the safety concerns it raises and the fact it touches on a complex web of issues, it may be valuable to have a single, well-designed digital 'front door' to give victims confidence in the information, the ability to browse and ask around the issue, safely and confidentially.

If England did develop a single digital front door, they could learn from the Welsh 'Live Fear Free' site, hosted by the government, but written and supported by partners across the sector, with a single helpline number, accessible for all, and open 24 hours a day.

Easy referral shouldn't just be available for victims, friends and family. The review should work with specialists, and advice services that refer onto specialists (medical professionals, social services, housing providers and so on) about how referrals could be simplified.

Given the depth and scale of the problem, we need cross-party, cross-government and cross-sector engagement to tackle the issue.

¹² Having an inclusive single digital service does not imply funding should be apportioned evenly to all services, or the services themselves should be gender neutral.

1. Introduction

Despite increasing policy attention and changing attitudes, domestic abuse is a feature of many relationships. Last year 1 in 15 women, and 1 in 33 men experienced domestic abuse at the hands of their partner or former partner.¹³ 1 in 4 women and 1 in 9 men have experienced this kind of abuse at some point in their adult lives. Around a third of those who are victimised experience 'severe force',¹⁴ and for some this is an almost continuous feature of their lives: 3 per cent of victims experienced abuse in the previous year "more than 50 times or too many times to count."¹⁵

The bleak reality is that these aren't some isolated incidents or a few individuals; domestic abuse is a 'normal' feature of many relationships. For the most part, domestic abuse stays under the radar of the justice system. Only 27 per cent of female victims and 10 per cent of male victims report to the police,¹⁶ often after years of escalating abuse.¹⁷ For most people domestic abuse remains officially unreported, and little spoken about.

This chapter briefly outlines the definition and data on domestic abuse in the UK, and clarifies the terminology and scope of this report.

1.1 What do we mean by domestic abuse?

The cross-government definition of domestic violence and abuse is:

any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional behaviours.

The definition gives further detail on controlling and coercive behaviours. The former is described as a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour. Coercive behaviour is an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.

¹³ Crime Survey of England and Wales 2012/13 (2014) Self completion module on intimate violence

¹⁴ Defined as kicked, hit, bitten, choked, strangled, threatened with a weapon, threats to kill, use of a weapon.

¹⁵ Guy J (2014) Early intervention in domestic violence and abuse. Early Intervention Foundation

¹⁶ Crime Survey of England and Wales 2012/13 (2014) Self completion module on intimate violence

¹⁷ SafeLives (2015) Getting it right first time.

In this report we refer to abuse rather than violence to include this broader spectrum of behaviours. The focus is on abuse between current or former partners - henceforward our use of domestic abuse refers to intimate relationships - as this is the predominant form of domestic abuse (estimated to have victimised almost 6 million people in England and Wales, compared to 2,796,000 victims of family abuse).¹⁸ However many of the issues under discussion, tools and recommendations will have relevance for other forms of family abuse.¹⁹

1.2 Who does abuse happen to?

Domestic abuse can happen to anyone, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, class, age or disability, amongst current or former partners, and in heterosexual or same-sex relationships. That said, there are some groups who are at higher risk of domestic abuse.

The gender issue

While domestic abuse can happen to anyone, regardless of gender or sexual orientation, the gender issue in domestic abuse must not be minimised. Women are around twice as likely as men to be victims of abuse, are more likely to experience repeated abuse,²⁰ and are at higher risk of homicide: almost half (45 per cent) of female homicide victims are killed by partners or former partners, compared to less than 4 per cent of male homicide victims. To see this as a gender-neutral issue would be to fundamentally misunderstand the reality and context of domestic abuse.

That said, domestic abuse does happen to men, and women can and do perpetrate domestic abuse. Any victim deserves the same level of sensitive treatment and access to support. Those who do not fit the female victim - male perpetrator model, may face additional barriers to speaking up about abuse, or accessing support.

There is very little research about abuse in LGB/T relationships, so prevalence is hard to calculate. However the research that has been conducted suggests domestic abuse may be high: one non-representative research study found 40 per cent of female respondents and 35 per cent of male respondents had experienced domestic abuse at some point in a same sex relationship.²¹

¹⁸ Crime Survey of England and Wales 2013/14 (2015)

¹⁹ We do not focus on minors, as there has been increasing attention paid in recent years on child abuse, with clear recommendations and statutory duties for those that encounter child abuse.

²⁰ Although government statistics are capped at 5 repeated incidents at 5, so the scale of sustained abuse can be missed

²¹ Donovan C, Hester M, Holmes J, McCarry M (2006) Comparing Domestic Abuse in Same Sex and Heterosexual Relationships.

“I didn’t tell anyone, I couldn’t because they wouldn’t believe me...domestic violence is something that men do to women, it’s not something that gay people do.”²²

The sensitivities in discussing abuse, both reflecting the gendered reality, while being inclusive to any victim, maybe one reason many are reluctant to publically discuss it. The delicacy of the gender question plays out in the government’s own approach: the Home Office definition of domestic abuse is explicitly inclusive of ‘gender or sexuality’, but the government’s strategy for tackling abuse is part of their ‘violence against women and girls’ agenda, which includes issues like FGM, which exclusively victimise females.

After discussion, we decided to approach the issue as domestic abuse rather than violence against women and girls, while acknowledging the issue predominantly affects women. As a service, Citizens Advice helps any individuals with any problem. For us, this means researching and campaigning on the issue of domestic abuse in a way that is inclusive of all who may be affected.

At risk groups

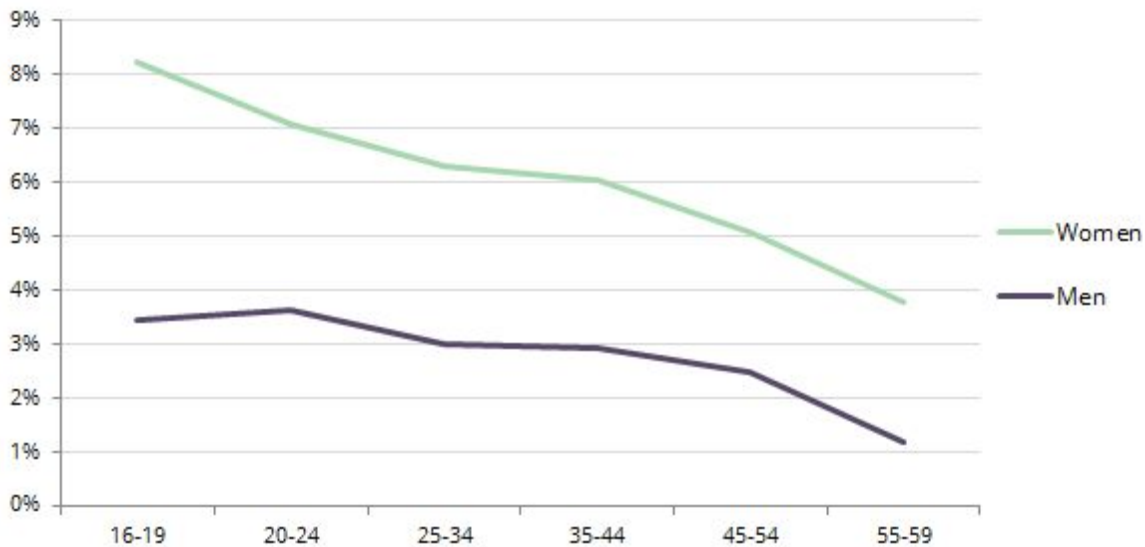
While estimations of abuse vary, some groups appear to be at higher risk, particularly those who have additional vulnerabilities, like being young, being pregnant or nursing, and/or being ill or disabled:

- Young people are particularly at risk, as risk of domestic abuse decreases with age. Studies of attitudes with young people have found greater proportions consider physical abuse is acceptable: in Wiltshire’s Young People Survey 24 per cent of 13-15 year olds agreed that ‘sometimes abuse or violence was ok’, and this rises to over 50 per cent of young people saying it can be ok for a woman to hit a man following infidelity.²³ Similarly in the Boys to Men research programme, 49 per cent of boys and 33 per cent of girls thought hitting in a relationship would be ok in at least one of a selection of scenarios.²⁴

²² Ibid.

²³ Government Office South West (2009) Wiltshire’s Young People Survey - exploring attitudes and views of domestic abuse in relationships

²⁴ Fox CL, Corr M, Gadd D and Butler I (2012) From Boys to Men. Phase one key findings.



▲ Figure 1: Percentage of men and women who experienced non-sexual domestic abuse from a partner or ex-partner in the previous year. Source: CSEW²⁵

- Domestic abuse is associated with pregnancy: an extensive study published in 2001 found around 30 per cent of domestic abuse begins in pregnancy;²⁶ a small scale study of 500 women attending an antenatal clinic in the North of England found 17 per cent of those pregnant experienced abuse.²⁷
- The Crime Survey of England and Wales found women and men with a long-term illness or disability were far more likely to be victims of any domestic abuse in the last year than those without, and this is most pronounced where the disability of illness limits their activities. 12.6 per cent of women and 4.9 per cent of men with a long-standing illness or disability which limited their activities experienced abuse in the previous year, compared to 4.9 per cent of women and 2.5 per cent of men without (Figure 2).²⁸ Research from 2013 found the odds of being a victim of domestic abuse were three-fold higher for those with a mental illness-related disability, compared to those without.²⁹

There's also a negative relationship between risk of abuse, and income.³⁰ Those with additional vulnerabilities or fewer resources can be at greater risk of abuse, and be less able to extricate themselves from abuse. And abuse can complicate existing vulnerabilities.

²⁵ Crime Survey of England and Wales 2013/14 (2015)

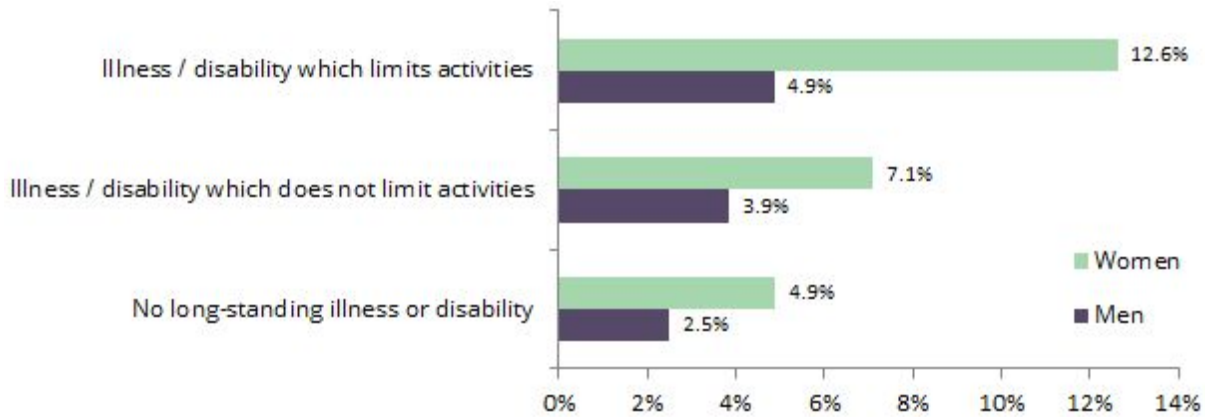
²⁶ Confidential enquiry into maternal and child health for England and Wales (2001) Why mothers die 1997-1999. London: RCOG Press.

²⁷ Johnson JK, Haider F, Ellis K et al (2003) The prevalence of domestic violence in pregnant women. BJOG: An International Journal of Obstetrics & Gynaecology 110: 272-5.

²⁸ Crime Survey of England and Wales 2013/14 (2015)

²⁹ Khalifeh H, Howard LM, Osborn D et al (2013) Violence against people with disability in England and Wales: Findings from a national cross-sectional survey.

³⁰ Crime Survey of England and Wales 2013/14 (2015)



▲ Figure 2: Percentage of men and women who experienced domestic abuse (non-sexual) from a partner or former partner in the last year, by those with long-standing illness or disability. Source: CSEW³¹

While not necessarily at greater risk of experiencing abuse, specific ethnic groups and immigrants may face additional cultural or language barriers to seeking help. Those with insecure immigration status may have worries about the implications of leaving a partner.

1.3 Harm and cost to the individual and society

Domestic abuse causes major harm to the individual and their families, and to society. In 2012/13, 16 per cent of all recorded violent crime was domestic abuse,³² and over a fifth of all homicides were perpetrated by a partner or ex-partner. This rises to just under half of all femicide.³³ The police deal with almost 60,000 cases of domestic abuse where there is high risk of serious harm or murder every year.³⁴

Domestic abuse has a negative impact on physical and mental health, which can continue even after contact with a perpetrator ceases. In the latest Crime Survey results, a quarter of victims (24 per cent) had received a physical injury in the previous year due to abuse, two fifths (40 per cent) experienced mental or emotional problems (52 per cent for women, 38 per cent for men). Four per cent had tried to end their own lives. And domestic violence is associated with mental health issues³⁵, including depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, insomnia, alcohol dependency and drug misuse, suicide attempts³⁶ and exacerbation of psychotic symptoms³⁷.

³¹ Crime Survey of England and Wales 2013/14 (2015)

³² Guy J (2014) Early intervention in domestic violence and abuse. Early Intervention Foundation

³³ Crime Survey of England and Wales 2012/13 (2014) Self completion module on intimate violence

³⁴ HMIC (2014) Everyone's business: improving the policy response to domestic abuse

³⁵ Rose D, Trevillion K, Woodall A, Morgan C, Feder G, Howard L (2011) Barriers and facilitators of disclosures of domestic violence by mental health service users: qualitative study. *The British Journal of Psychiatry* Feb 2011, 198 (3) 189-194

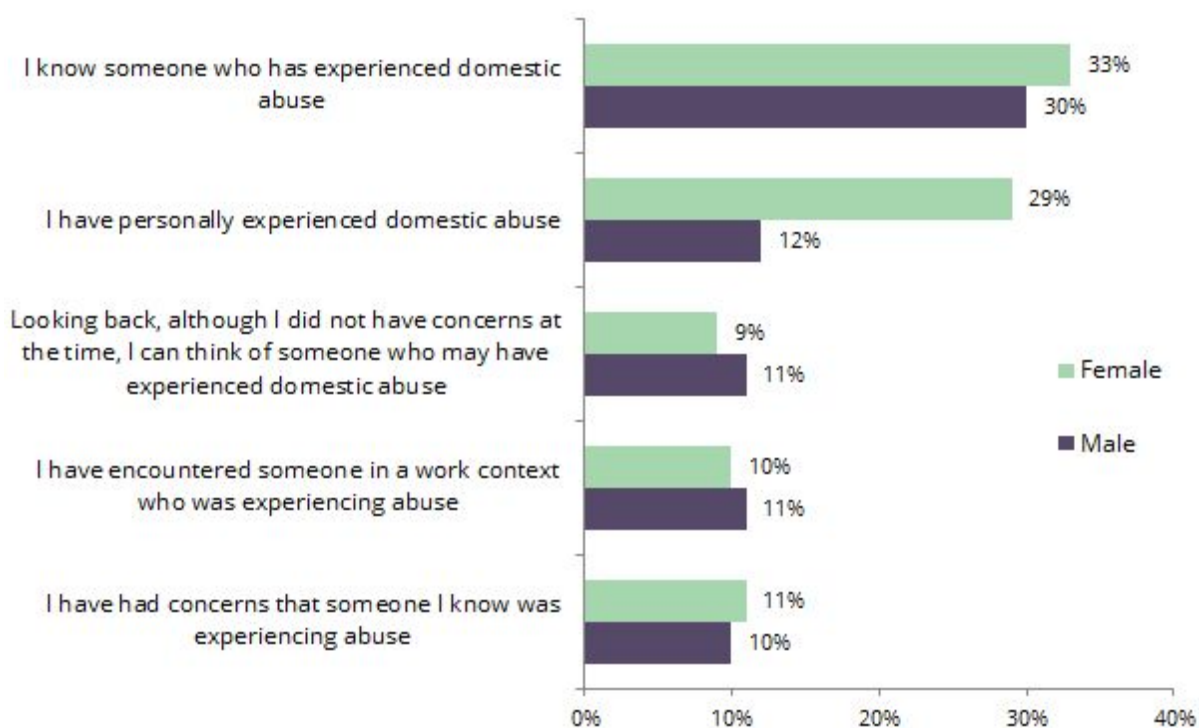
³⁶ Golding MJ (1999) Intimate partner violence as a risk factor for mental disorders: a meta-analysis. *J Fam Violence*; 14: 99- 132.

³⁷ Neria Y, Bromet EJ, Carlson GA, Naz B. Assaultive trauma and illness course in psychotic bipolar disorder: findings from the suffolk county mental health project. *Acta Psychiatr Scand* 2005 ; 111: 380- 3.

This comes at a cost. Abuse is calculated to cost £4bn to public services, from health to housing, police and justice.³⁸ Domestic abuse costs the health services £1.9 billion each year, and this puts strain on both primary and secondary care. Victims who have received even slight physical wounds through domestic violence will visit their GP three times more than the average;³⁹ victims of any abuse experience more operative surgery, more visits to health professionals, more hospital stays, more pharmacies visits and more mental health consultations over their lifetime than the average, as a result of abuse. Currently an estimated £176 million is spent on mental health services for victims of abuse.⁴⁰

Days taken off work, and job interruption costs a further £2bn a year to the economy.⁴¹

As well as the harm to the individual, abuse has ripple effects to family, friends, neighbours and communities. In our online 'Understanding Abuse' survey, 63 per cent of women and 48 per cent of men had either experienced domestic abuse personally, or known or suspected that someone known to them has.



▲ Figure 3: 'Which of the following statements, if any, apply to you and your experience of domestic abuse?' Source: Understanding Abuse. Base: all respondents (2,063)

The most extensive economic modelling of domestic abuse puts wider human costs at a further £10 billion, using modelling based on road death costs to calculate long-term and societal rippled impacts. These costs don't include the wider

³⁸ Walby S, Allen J. Domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking: finding from the British Crime Survey. Home Office Research Study 276. London, Home Office, 2004

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Walby S (2009) The cost of domestic violence: update 2009, Lancaster University

⁴¹ Ibid.

long-term impact on mental health and intergenerational effects of domestic abuse on children⁴²: 20 per cent of children witness domestic abuse.⁴³

Domestic abuse has can also have negative impacts for long-term practical issues - often the point where individuals might proactively approach Citizens Advice for advice - for example child custody, housing, benefit entitlements, divorce, legal aid or credit rating. The introduction of single payment of benefits through Universal Credit, shortage of housing, and restrictions to legal aid may all exacerbate problems for victims of abuse seeking to rebuild their lives.

1.4 Our approach: minimising harm by considering friends and family

This report focuses on the role of civil society, particularly on friends, family, colleagues or neighbours. We examine how they fit into the landscape of more formal support, both to recognise abuse earlier and to act as a bridge to specialists.

We report on new primary data from our 'Understanding Abuse' survey. This was an online survey conducted by ComRes with a nationally representative cross-section of over 2,000 respondents.⁴⁴ We also draw on other secondary data and literature sources, including the Crime Survey for England and Wales, and particularly the research on informal networks or bystanders by Rachel Latta, Lisa Goodman and Renate Klein.⁴⁵ Given the sensitivities of recruiting individuals who had themselves experienced abuse we have not conducted primary qualitative research or used case studies, but have drawn on some accounts of abuse that individuals publicly shared online about their experiences.

In this report we explore:

1. what barriers prevent victims speaking up about abuse, and how these can be overcome
2. how we can widen the net of people aware and involved in aiding victims of abuse, whilst ensuring those supporters feel confident and able to engage safely and appropriately
3. what structures need to be in place to ensure there is emotional and practical specialist support in place following disclosure, both for the victim and supporter.

⁴² Guy J (2014) Early intervention in domestic violence and abuse. Early Intervention Foundation

⁴³ Radford, L. et al (2011) Child abuse and neglect in the UK today

⁴⁴ ComRes interviewed 2,063 British adults online between the 8th and 10th May 2015. Data were weighted to be representative of British adults aged 18+.

⁴⁵ In particular Klein R (2014) Responding to Intimate Violence against Women: The Role of Informal Networks Cambridge University Press; and Latta RE and Goodman LA (2011) 'Intervening in Partner Violence Against Women: A Grounded Theory Exploration of Informal Network Members' Experiences' The Counseling Psychologist October 201139: 973-1023

1.5 Scope and focus

This research builds on the evidence and recommendations in *Struggling for Support?*⁴⁶ which assessed whether victims of domestic abuse were able to access the support they need to manage their relationships, keep themselves safe, exercise their rights to their property, children, access to justice, and rebuild their lives. We highlighted changes that are needed to ensure the government's commitment to provide legal aid, fund helplines and house victims of abuse were realised on the ground, including calls for revisions to evidence requirements for legal aid, guidelines for financial institutions, and the realisation of entitlements and exemptions for victims of domestic abuse in housing and benefit support. This research also develops earlier work on the prevalence and type of financial abuse, discussed in *Controlling money; controlling lives*.⁴⁷

The emphasis on this report is on facilitating victim disclosure through civic engagement. That leaves us open to the criticism that this is, yet another, intervention targeting the victim to act, rather than holding the perpetrator to account or challenging society not to commit abuse. We did consider how we could engage or intervene with the perpetrators, however following expert advice, we felt that perpetrator intervention from civil society had a high risk of being ineffective: many of those who are abusive refuse to recognise themselves as perpetrators, and build up strong psychological barriers against acknowledging their own behaviour.⁴⁸ More fundamentally, we had concerns that public challenge to perpetrator behaviour could put victims at greater risk.

⁴⁶ Parker I (2015) Victims of domestic abuse: Struggling for support? Citizens Advice

⁴⁷ Johnson-Ross F, Stickland H, Parker I, Edwards S (2014) *Controlling Money, Controlling Lives: Financial abuse in Britain* Citizens Advice.

⁴⁸ We are supportive of initiatives which aim to educate or challenge attitudes and behaviours to minimise perpetration. We also welcome the developing research in this field on perpetrator programmes, as well as initiatives being developed by SafeLives and others. Where successful, these can be a valuable tool in minimising abuse and increasing victim safety, putting the onus on perpetrators changing their behaviour.

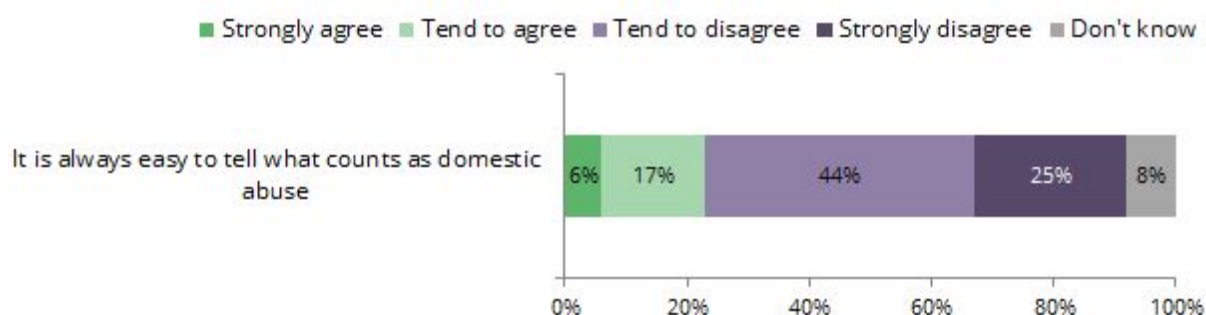
2. Barriers to victims accessing specialist support

Despite the harm and disruption abuse causes, victims find it difficult to seek help and access effective support.

There are barriers to seeking help at numerous stages in an abusive relationship. Victims may not recognise abuse as such, especially when it is non-physical. Even if they identify and acknowledge that they are experiencing domestic abuse, there may be complicated emotional or practical reasons for not seeking help. Abuse can erode self-confidence or self-worth, and there can be stigma attached to being subject to abuse: victims may feel they are partly to blame, be embarrassed that it happened to them, worry about being believed, or fear the implications of disclosure, especially if they don't want the relationship to end. Perpetrators can erect emotional and practical barriers making it harder to victims to extricate themselves from the relationship. Tactics can include social isolation, manipulation, threats, or creating physical or financial restrictions.

2.1 Not all victims recognise all abuse

In our Understanding Abuse survey, two-thirds of individuals who had personal experience of domestic abuse disagreed with the statement 'it is always easy to recognise what counts as domestic abuse'. Only 11 per cent strongly agreed with the statement.



▲ Figure 4: 'To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement about domestic abuse?'
Source: Understanding Abuse. Base: those with personal experience of domestic abuse (427)

To assess recognition of abuse, respondents were shown a series of scenarios, and asked whether the behaviours depicted domestic abuse, a criminal offence, both or neither. Even in examples of physical abuse, not all respondents correctly identified behaviours as domestic abuse, even when they had been victims themselves. One in six (17 per cent) of those with personal experience of abuse

failed to categorise the scenario of 'pushing, slapping or grabbing' a partner as both domestic abuse and a crime. More than 1 in 20 (6 per cent) of those who had personally experienced abuse did not categorise 'punching, kicking or choking' a partner as both domestic abuse and a crime. This rose to over a tenth (12 per cent) when looking at the British public overall.

There's lack of clarity of emotional, psychological and financial abuse

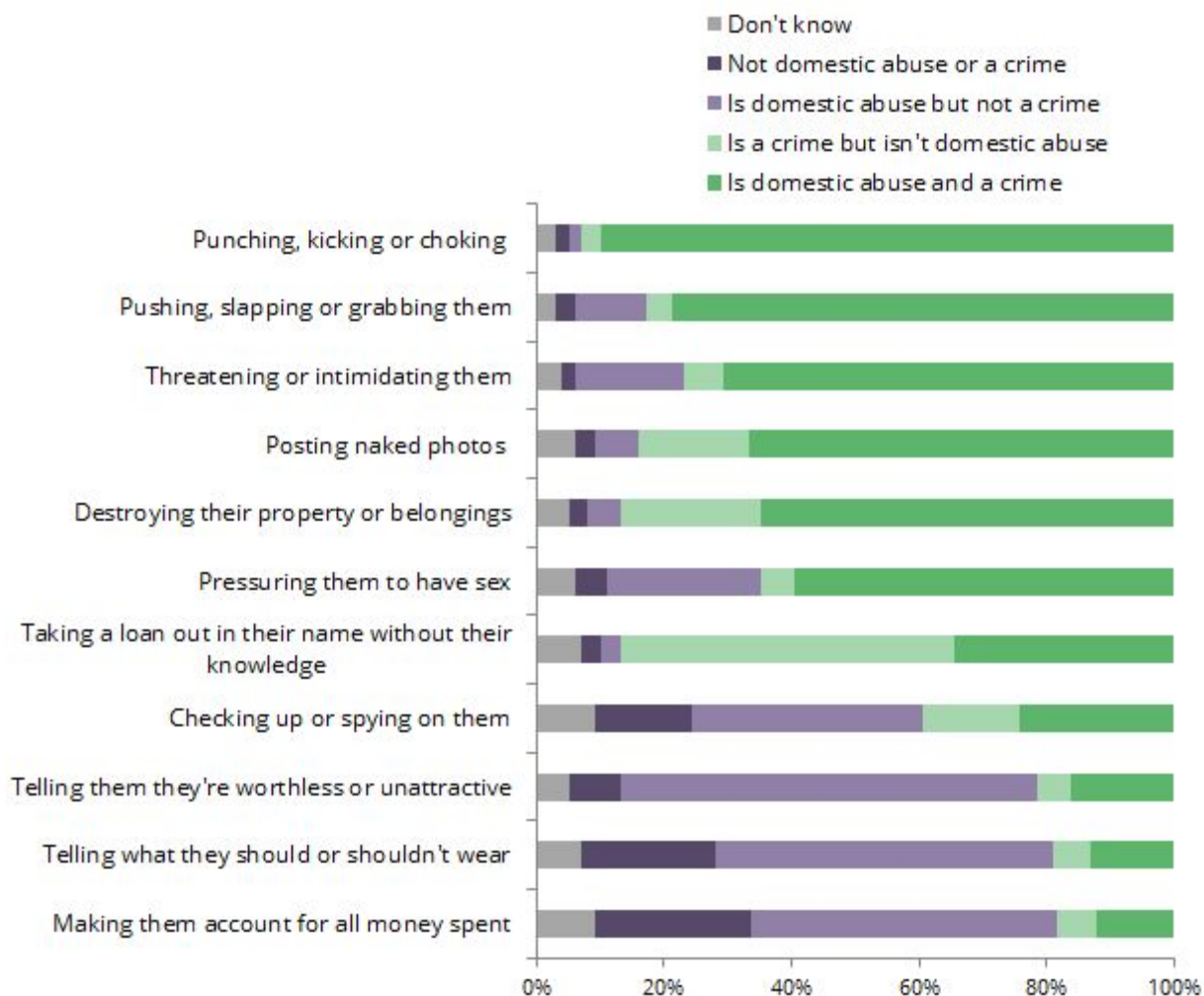
Confusion about whether certain behaviours amongst couples constituted domestic abuse, or a crime, is particularly acute in cases of non-physical abuse. As one survivor put it:

“I was in an abusive relationship
and I didn't even clock until
afterwards...I always thought abuse
was a guy hitting you.”

Even amongst those with personal experience of abuse, one in eight (13 per cent) disagree that domestic abuse could involve no physical violence at all.

Those scenarios we tested which had no explicit physical violence, like 'pressuring someone to have sex', 'checking up or spying on a partner' or 'making them account for all the money they spend' elicited greater disagreement about whether it 'counted' as domestic abuse (Figure 5).

In examples of financial abuse, emotional abuse or controlling behaviours, the responses were more tentative. Two fifths (40 per cent) of respondents did not believe, or were not sure whether, making a partner account for all the money they spent constituted domestic abuse, and 'checking up or spying on them online, through friends, by looking through their post, journal, mobile or email' had a fairly even spread of answers.



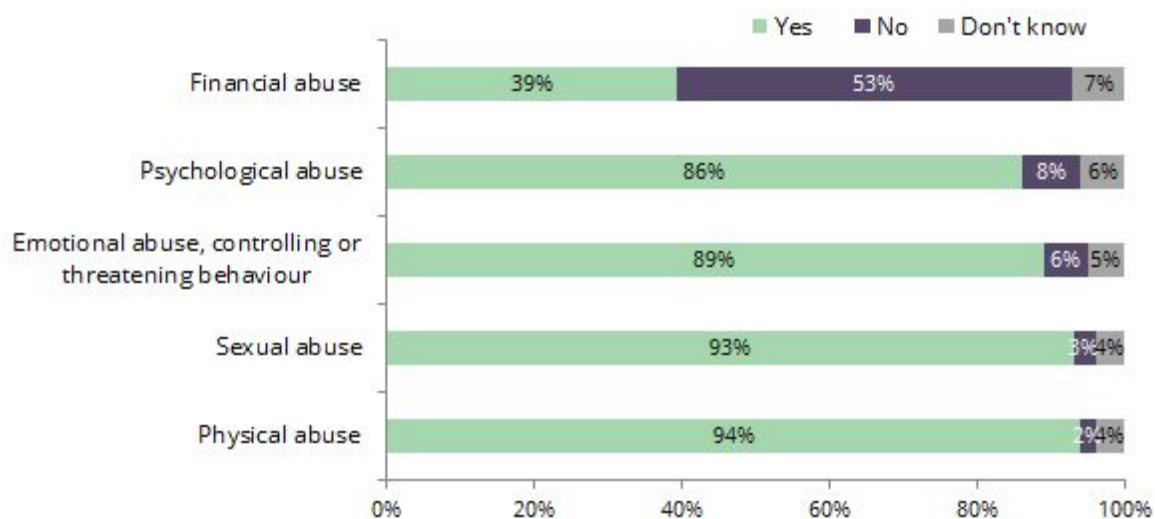
▲ Figure 5: 'For each of the following actions towards a partner (whether married or not), please select whether you believe they count as domestic abuse, a crime, or neither.' Source: Understanding Abuse. Base: all respondents (2,063)

When we shared the government definition of domestic abuse with our complete sample of the population, and asked them explicitly about their awareness of each type of abuse, around 1 in 20 said they were not aware that physical or sexual abuse constituted domestic abuse. Far more were unaware of emotional or psychological abuse (one in ten, and one in seven respectively). Less than two fifths (39 per cent) of the respondents knew financial abuse constituted domestic abuse (Figure 6).

The lack of knowledge of financial abuse, even amongst victims, is echoed in evidence through our advice service. Research with advisers last year found that 90 per cent of our advisers who work with cases of domestic abuse have helped somebody who did not realise they were a victim of financial abuse.⁴⁹ One explained: "many people assume abuse has to be physical, so would not see themselves as a victim even if [they] experienced other types of [abuse]."⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Parker I (2015) Victims of domestic abuse: Struggling for support? Citizens Advice

⁵⁰ Ibid.



▲ Figure 6: Following the government definition, 'before today, were you aware that domestic abuse included each of these types of behaviour?' Source: Understanding Abuse. Base: all respondents (2,063)

2.2 Victims who recognise abuse may not want to disclose

In our 'Understanding Abuse' survey, over a third (36 per cent) of those individuals who had personal experience of domestic abuse told us no one knew about the abuse. Reluctance to disclose can be due to fear of repercussions, shame, fear of blame or, for some, a sense that their experience is a normal part of a relationship.

Shame, blame and stigma

"You really feel it's you. The more they hit you...you convince yourself that it's you... i convinced myself 'well look, this is the third violent relationship I've had, it can't be them it must be me, it must be something I'm doing wrong.'"

"[People would think]: 'Oh she must be weak to put up with it, why did she let it happen?'"⁵¹

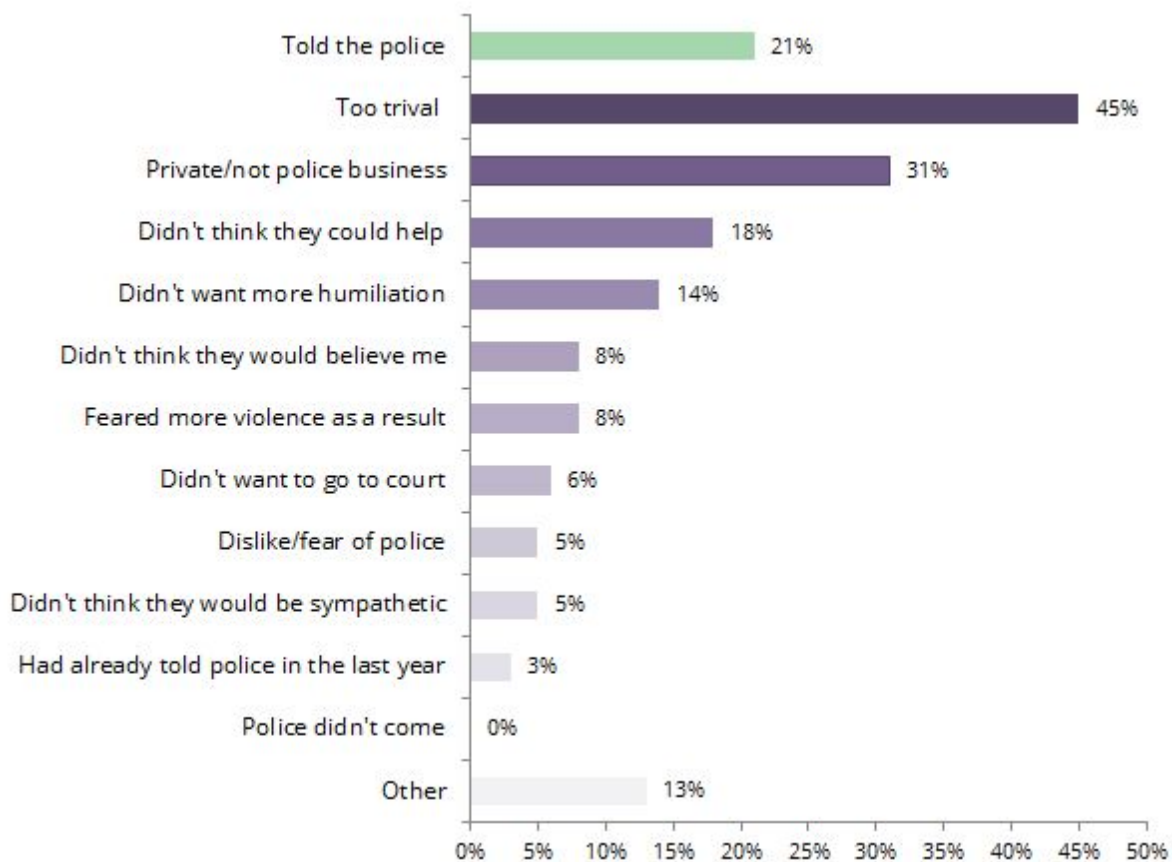
There are emotional blocks or barriers, particularly following extensive emotional abuse, to speaking out. Victims can blame themselves, or feel ashamed or stigmatised. Others may believe it is a private matter, to be dealt with behind closed doors. Or victims can minimise their own experiences, thinking it isn't

⁵¹ Rose D, Trevillion K, Woodall A, Morgan C, Feder G, Howard L (2011) Barriers and facilitators of disclosures of domestic violence by mental health service users: qualitative study. The British Journal of Psychiatry Feb 2011, 198 (3) 189-194

important enough to count as abuse, tell the police, or engage with domestic abuse specialists. Victims may have specific worries about the implications of telling anyone - either for themselves or their families.

“Part of the reason...I didn’t ring the police [was] because I was scared for my son...if I ring the police and tell them my son was sitting there they’d get the social and take him away. I would end up losing him, so I put up with it.”⁵²

The British Crime Survey found that 4 in 5 victims of domestic abuse don’t tell the police. The main reasons given for not reporting the abuse to the police included seeing it as too trivial (45 per cent), or that it was private (33 per cent). 14 per cent ‘didn’t want more humiliation’, and 8 per cent didn’t think the police would believe them:



▲ Figure 7: Percentage of victims and who they told. Source: CSEW⁵³

⁵² Radford L., Corral S, Bradley C et al (2011) Child abuse and neglect in the UK today. London: NSPCC

⁵³ Crime Survey of England and Wales 2012/13 (2014) Why the victim did not tell the police about the partner abuse experienced in the last year

And worries aren't solely due to reluctance to engage with the police service specifically. Similar reasons were given by victims for not telling anyone, including friends and family, about abuse.



▲ Figure 8: Reasons given from victims of abuse who had not told anyone. Source: YouGov/Refuge⁵⁴

Perpetrators can hinder victims seeking help

Abusers can put obstacles in place to make it difficult for victims to leave. Survivors describe emotional, financial and physical barriers to leaving.

“I stayed because I loved him...I stayed because he was the financial provider.”⁵⁵

I tried to leave the house once after an abusive episode, and he blocked me. He slept in front of the door that entire night. #WhyIStayed⁵⁶

2.3 Friends and family: the link in the chain?

Encouraging disclosure is important for emotional and practical support⁵⁷ and ‘speaking out’ or ‘breaking the silence’ has become a rallying cry for victims and survivors. However there is much less consideration given to how to encourage disclosure, and what structures need to be in place following disclosure.

Some attention has been given to developing specialist responses - for example Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs) and improving police practice.

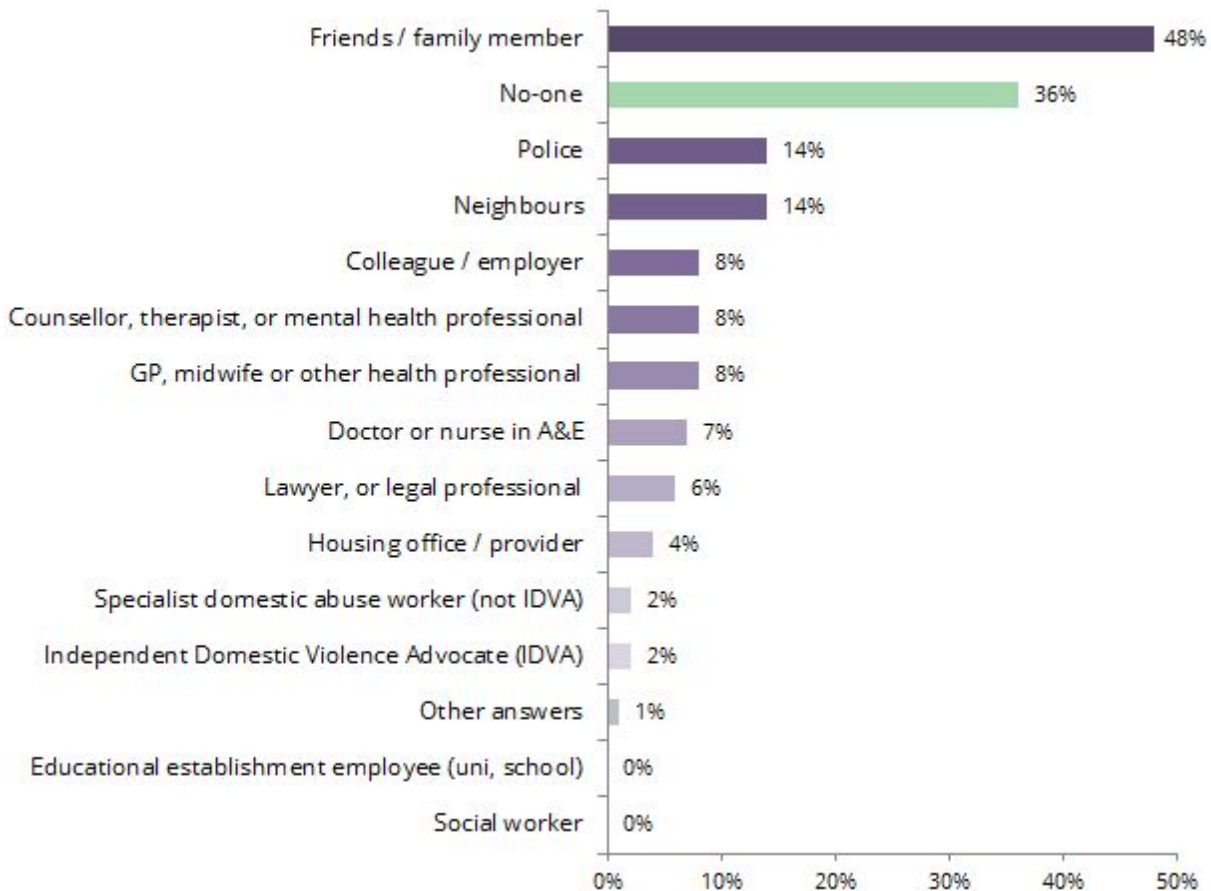
⁵⁴ YouGov poll of 2,244 women, carried out 3-5 Sept. 2014, carried out on behalf of refuge. <http://www.refuge.org.uk/2014/09/17/loose-women-and-refuge-launch-domestic-violence-campaign/>

⁵⁵ Quote taken from Twitter #WhyIStayed discussion

⁵⁶ Quote taken from Twitter #WhyIStayed discussion

⁵⁷ Klein R (2014) Responding to Intimate Violence against Women: The Role of Informal Networks; Levendosky, AA, Bogat GA, Theran SA, Trotter JS, von Eye, A, and Davidson WS (2004). The social networks of women experiencing domestic violence. *American Journal of Community Psychology*. 34. 95-109. et al 2004

But the reality is the majority of victims never engage with these trained specialists. In our nationwide survey, of those who had personally experienced domestic abuse, a third had told no-one, only 14 per cent had told police, 6 per cent a lawyer or legal professional, and just 2 per cent had engaged with a specialist domestic abuse worker.



▲ Figure 9: ‘Thinking about your most recent personal experience of domestic abuse, did anyone else know about the abuse?’ Source: Understanding Abuse. Base: those with personal experience of domestic abuse (427)⁵⁸.

There are ways to narrow the gap between victims and specialists, by increasing awareness about support available, and improving police practice, for example. But tackling deeply entrenched attitudes about privacy, blame or minimisation will be harder to realise.

You find it really hard to take that step, because you know there’s nobody behind you to catch you. The only person that’s going to catch you is the one who’s going to slap you.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Answers sum to more than 100% as respondents could select more than one answer.

⁵⁹ Kelly L, Sharp N and Klein R (2014) Finding the costs of freedom. Solace Women’s Aid

The informal networks of friends, family, neighbours or colleagues can be a powerful resource in bridging the gap between victims and specialists. They are more likely to be aware of abuse, and many will be personally invested in wishing to help. By encouraging their involvement to recognise abuse, safely engage, to facilitate disclosure and enable victims to make the right decisions for them, friends, family and the wider community can enable those subject to abuse to move on safely.

3. Friends, family and community: the importance of informal networks

There is little research on the role of friends and family in domestic abuse, and much of what exists is from US studies on 'bystander' research. Yet the little information that does exist makes clear that this group deserves greater consideration. The social network within which abuse occurs can have a powerful role, either in identifying abuse and supporting the victim, or in (often unwittingly) sustaining or enabling abuse. And, for their own sake, friends or family of victims deserve more policy consideration, given the toll support can take, especially in cases of continuing or extreme abuse.

This chapter briefly summarises the evidence around bystander engagement, drawing on our public attitudes data. We make the case for the important and positive role informal networks can play, before moving on to probe the barriers to and difficulties associated with engagement.

3.1 Victims disclose to friends and family

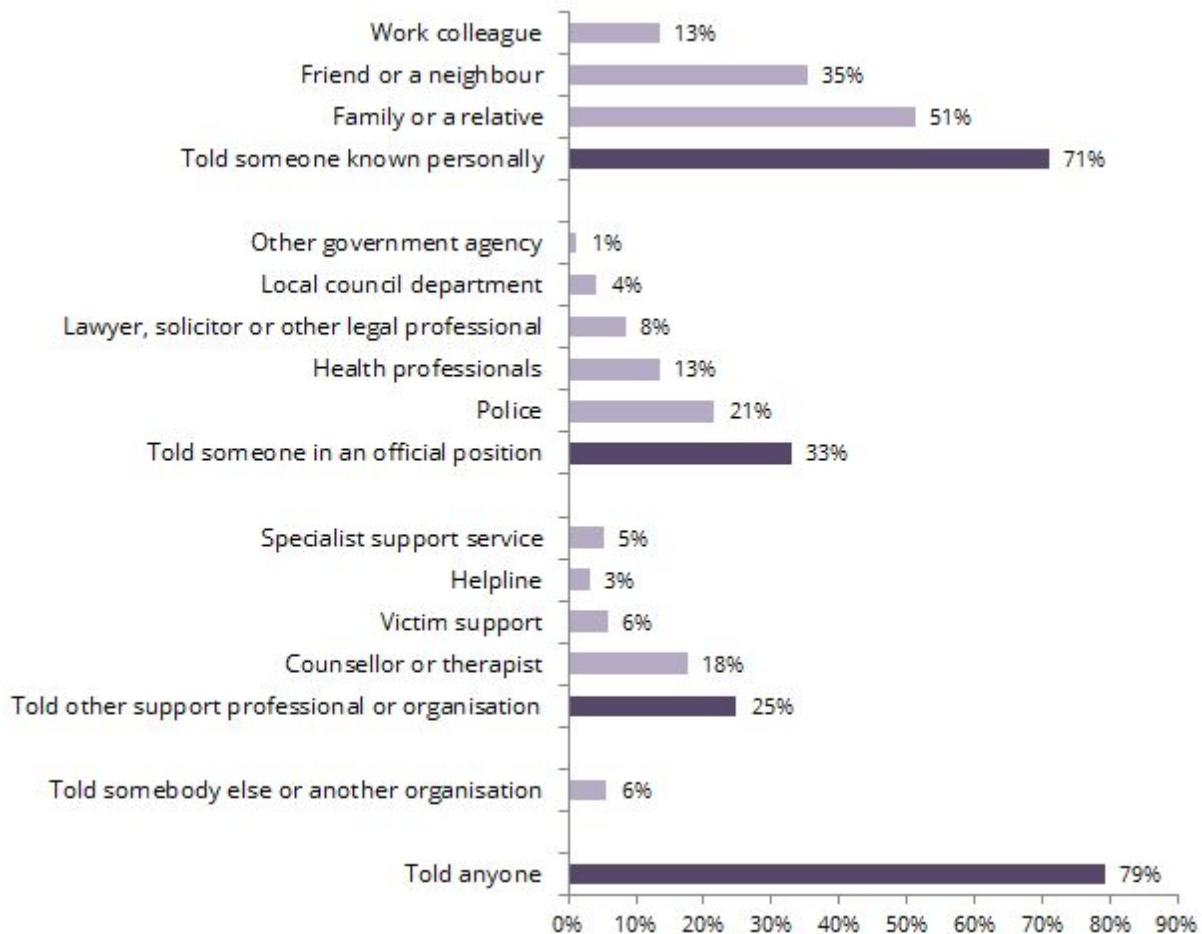
Friends and family are more likely to be aware of abuse than anyone else. The British Crime Survey of victims found more than two thirds (71 per cent) of individuals who experienced domestic abuse last year, told someone personally close to them, compared to just one third (33 per cent) who told an official (police for example), and only a quarter (25 per cent) who spoke to a specialist or a support organisation (Figure 10). This attests to a similar pattern in our own data on victim disclosure referred to in the last chapter.

In most cases, if someone reveals abuse, it will be to a personal contact, someone close to them. As friends or relatives are often the first people told, the way they respond can affect the likelihood of further disclosures, and ultimately trajectories of leaving abuse.⁶⁰

While there is little research (and much of what does exist relies on victim reports rather than third parties themselves), what there is indicates that when social support works well, it is related to positive mental health outcomes, a higher quality of life, a willingness and ability to seek formal support and physical safety.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Klein R (2014) *Responding to Intimate Violence against Women: The Role of Informal Networks* Cambridge University Press

⁶¹ Latta RE and Goodman LA (2011) 'Intervening in Partner Violence Against Women: A Grounded Theory Exploration of Informal Network Members' Experiences' *The Counseling Psychologist* October 2011:939-973



▲ Figure 10: Percentage of victims who disclosed to professionals and personal networks. Source: CSEW⁶²

Successful support from friends and family can be instrumental in helping victims to leave an abusive relationship, and rebuild their lives.

3.2 Emotional and practical support

Friends and family can have positive impact through their emotional support, by bolstering a victim's confidence, self-esteem and dignity, and believing (and reinforcing) their account of the relationship.⁶³ Beyond emotional support, friends can practically enable a victim to consider to leaving their relationship by offering a safe place to stay, money, childcare, or travel.

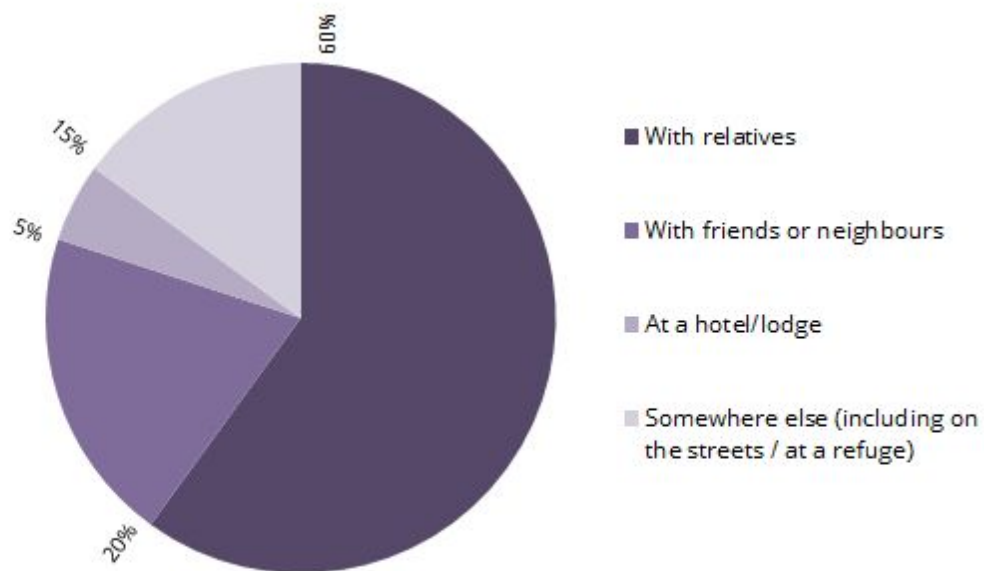
For example, the first night alone - a critical moment in transition from victim to survivor - often relies on friends or family. Abrahams' in-depth study of survivors, found that an evening visit from a friend or neighbour diminishes the likelihood of the victim returning to the perpetrator.⁶⁴ The data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales shows when individuals leave shared accommodation following

⁶² Crime Survey England and Wales 2012/13 (2014). Darker bars present the total for that category

⁶³ Klein R (2014) Responding to Intimate Violence against Women: The Role of Informal Networks Cambridge University Press

⁶⁴ Abrahams H (2010), Rebuilding Lives After Domestic Violence: Understanding Long-Term Outcomes London/Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

abuse, in the majority of cases the first night was with friends, relatives or neighbours.



▲ Figure 11: Where the last year partner abuse victims spent their first night having left the shared accommodation because of the abuse. Source: CSEW⁶⁵

The role of informal supporters providing finance, accommodation or emotional support is particularly important, given stretched public resources, with further cuts to local budgets to come.⁶⁶ Over a quarter of victims who *did not* leave shared accommodation following abuse cite having nowhere to go as the reason (27 per cent).⁶⁷ Having assets and resources held jointly with their abusers can make it difficult for victims to be financially independent.

“Though I was the sole wage earner most of my marriage, everything was in his name. I had no credit rating. Nobody would rent to me.”⁶⁸

As outlined in *Struggling for Support*, despite entitlements to housing, benefits and legal aid for victims of domestic abuse, these do not always materialise on the ground.⁶⁹ The importance of friends and family in providing material support is only likely to increase.

⁶⁵ Crime Survey of England and Wales 2012/13 (2014)

⁶⁶ Parker I (2015) Victims of domestic abuse: Struggling for support? Citizens Advice

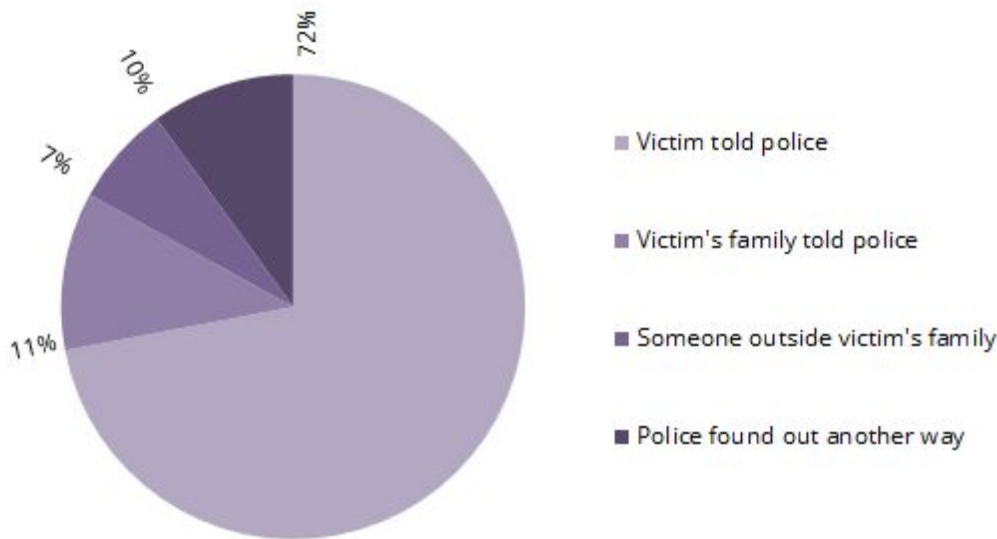
⁶⁷ Crime Survey of England and Wales 2012/13 (2014) Self-completion module on domestic violence

⁶⁸ Quote taken from Twitter #WhyIStayed discussion

⁶⁹ Parker I (2015) Victims of domestic abuse: Struggling for support? Citizens Advice

3.3 Informal networks can bridge the gap to specialists

Beyond offering personal support, friends act as conduits to formal services, by enabling or encouraging victims to seek formal help, either by actively accompanying them to a specialist, or by finding out about the implications of disclosing to the police, for example. In some cases, informal networks directly report abuse to specialists: in almost a fifth of cases which were reported to police, the information came from a third party.



▲ Figure 12: How the police came to know about domestic violence. Source: British Crime Survey⁷⁰

As well as being a potential gateway to criminal justice and police protection, informal networks can also indirectly increase reporting, by mitigating some of the barriers to disclosure, such as worrying the issue was too trivial or private, or fearing they wouldn't be believed.

However, accessing support from friends and family is not without complication. As with victims, friends struggle to recognise abuse, and can help sustain abuse, even unwittingly. Social networks shape the ecology of the relationship, and there is some evidence that support networks can shy away from engaging, by minimising what's going on, inadvertently playing a part in isolating a victim. This is rarely done intentionally: friends may be acting out of concern for the victim's privacy, be apprehensive about 'getting something wrong or interfering in a private situation.'⁷¹

⁷⁰ Walby S, Allen J (2004) Domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking: Findings from the British Crime Survey

⁷¹ Klein R (2014) Responding to Intimate Violence against Women: The Role of Informal Networks Cambridge University Press

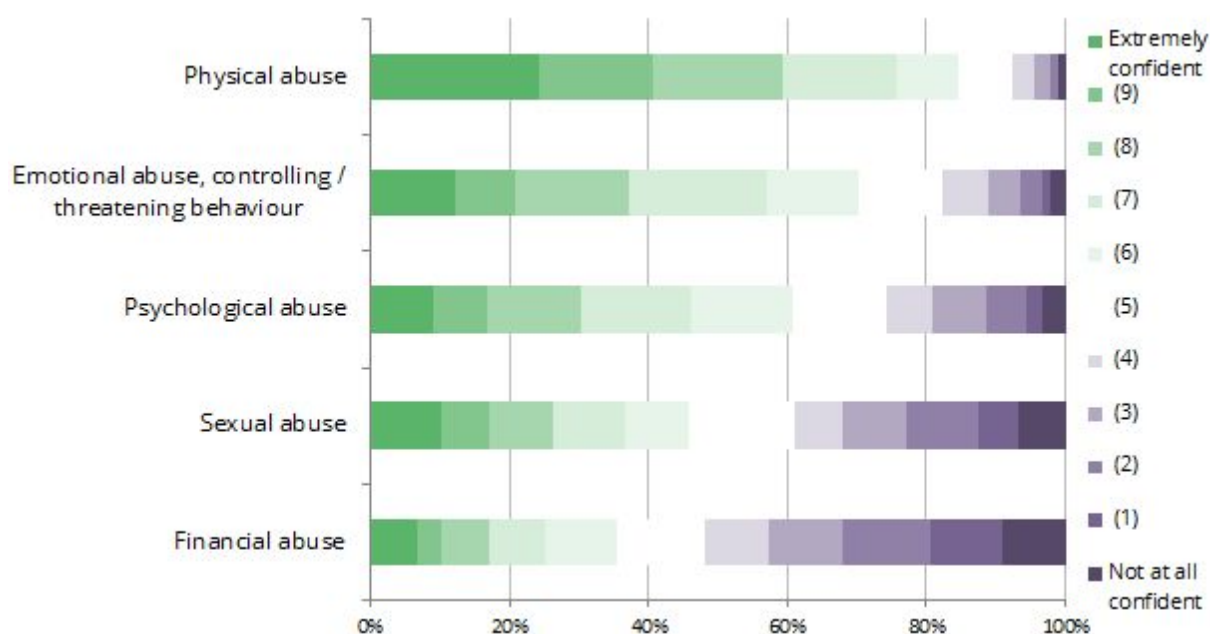
4. Barriers to effective support

Even assuming that friends and family would be willing and able to engage with and support someone experiencing domestic abuse, recognising what abuse is can be the first barrier to providing support. Even when aware of abuse, they can be unsure about what action to take, vicariously victimised, and not know about what resources or appropriate services may be accessible, both for the victim and for themselves.

4.1 Missing abuse

Friends struggle to recognise domestic abuse. In our 'Understanding Abuse' survey only a third of our respondents said that they would feel confident that they could recognise domestic abuse. This only rises to 42 per cent when looking specifically at those who have personally experienced abuse.

Looking into the different types of abuse, only in the case of physical abuse do more than half the respondents feel confident⁷² they could recognise if it was happening to someone they knew.



▲ Figure 13: 'No relationship is perfect, so sometimes it can be difficult to know what counts as abuse, particularly if you never see any physical violence. For each of the following types of domestic abuse, please indicate how confident you are that you would be able to recognise it if it was happening in a friend's relationship'. Source: Understanding Abuse. Base: All respondents (2,063).

This may be partly due to the private nature of domestic abuse. But this also no doubt reflects the difficulty people have in knowing exactly when non-physical behaviours cross the line into domestic abuse.

⁷² Selected 8-10 on a scale from 0-10, where 10 was 'extremely confident'.

Not all are clear what 'counts' as abuse

Only one in five respondents believe that 'it is always easy to tell what counts as abuse'. And as discussed in chapter 2, there is a lack of clarity about whether certain scenarios constitute abuse, and a criminal offence.

Respondents aren't solely unclear about whether certain behaviours count as abuse, there is also confusion as to who abuse can happen to. Sizable minorities question whether domestic abuse can only happen between cohabiting couples, between ex-partners, or in same-sex couples:

- When asked whether domestic abuse can only occur between people in a relationship who live together, not between people who are casually dating, only half of respondents strongly disagreed.
- Only 44 per cent strongly disagreed with the statement 'it's not called domestic abuse if it takes place after the relationship has ended'.
- 1 in 8 (12 per cent) indicated they agreed or didn't know whether the statement 'it doesn't count as domestic abuse if the couple are the same sex' was correct.

Abusive relationships often do not always resemble the way abuse is portrayed or imagined, especially in their early stages. It may be difficult to see a friend as a 'victim', or their partner as a 'perpetrator'. Many people have relationships or loyalties with both parties, and a perpetrator isn't solely or always a perpetrator: they are also a friend, employee, parent or sibling. Recognising abuse can be more complicated where there is skilled manipulation by the perpetrator, either of the victim or third parties. Substance dependency, mental health issues or other factors may complicate the presentation of the relationship.

Isolation and invisibility

Noticing abuse can be made more difficult by the perpetrator. Through controlling or threatening behaviours, perpetrators can cut a victim's social network and restrict their interactions with others.

"#WhyIStayed because he isolated me from all my friends and family and i had no one to turn to when the abuse started."⁷³

"I was isolated - he created an "us vs them" mentality to everyone

⁷³ Quote taken from Twitter #WhyIStayed discussion

(especially those who saw the abuse, lies etc)"⁷⁴

Social isolation can be a key tactic and deliberate form of abuse and control, and can mean that friends or family are out of reach or regular contact, meaning it's harder for them to witness what's going on. Friends and family may not be alert to these tactics, and allow somebody to be deliberately cut off.⁷⁵

"He would make people that came to visit me very uncomfortable so that they never came back and I ended up isolated because I wouldn't bring people back, I wouldn't invite people, so I ended up totally isolated."⁷⁶

"When I finally left him I was left with nobody. Apart from my sisters I was in my own little bubble."⁷⁷

If someone is retreating, disengaging or becoming withdrawn or invisible in their social circle, this can be a barrier to identifying abuse in the future. Perpetrators can also manipulate friends and family, turning them against, or making them unsympathetic to the victim. One survivor recounts her abusive partner even turning her own family against her:

"He turned my family against me...I found out that he had phoned my brother when we were together and told my brother that I'd said I didn't want nothing to do with him: that he wasn't my family anymore and that all I needed was him."⁷⁸

For informal networks to engage, they need a clear account and illustration of what domestic abuse can look like, who it can happen to, and what some of the 'early warning signs' are.

⁷⁴ Quote taken from Twitter #WhyIStayed discussion

⁷⁵ Pence E and Paymar M 1993 Education Groups for Men Who Batter: The Duluth Model. NY: Springer.

⁷⁶ Kelly L, Sharp N and Klein R (2014) Finding the costs of freedom Solace Women's Aid

⁷⁷ Ibid

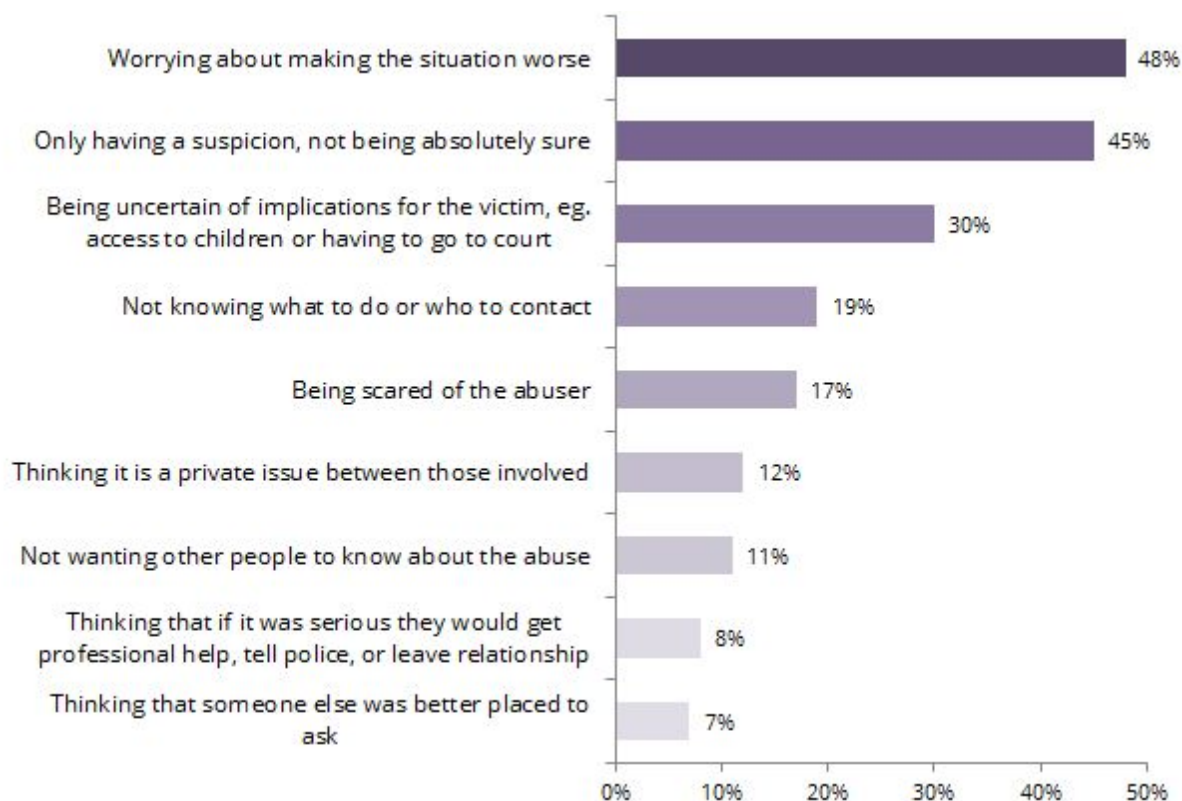
⁷⁸ Kelly L, Sharp N and Klein R (2014) Finding the costs of freedom Solace Women's Aid

4.2 Reluctance to ask

Even if friends recognise domestic abuse, they may not engage. Given the sensitivity and private nature of the issue, even close friends and family may assume somebody else is better placed to ask, be concerned about taking on responsibility and getting it wrong, or simply unsure as to how to start the conversation. They may be anxious about disrupting the relationship they currently have with either the perpetrator or the victim.⁷⁹

We asked our sample whether any reasons might prevent them from telling somebody, if they thought someone they knew was in an abusive relationship. Only 16 per cent of respondents indicated that nothing would discourage them from speaking up if they knew of abuse.

Almost half of respondents (48 per cent) selected 'worrying about making the situation worse' as a barrier to engaging directly, and a similar proportion said they would be reluctant to speak up if they 'only had a suspicion, but weren't absolutely sure.' Just under a third of respondents said a barrier to engagement would be lack of knowledge about the implications for the victim, and a fifth wouldn't know what to do, or who to contact.



▲ Figure 14: 'If you thought someone you know was in an abusive relationship, which of the following, if any, would seriously discourage you from telling somebody else about your concerns?' Source: Understanding Abuse. Base: All respondents (2,063)

⁷⁹ Klein R (2014) Responding to Intimate Violence against Women: The Role of Informal Networks. Cambridge University Press

Interestingly, in almost every category, those with personal experience of abuse were at least as likely to select options as barriers to engagement. Having had experience of abuse meant that, if anything, the barriers to engaging were felt more acutely, rather than less.

Of course, it's difficult for respondents to a survey to accurately predict what they might or might not do in a hypothetical situation.

Amongst the few academics that have conducted primary research with victims' informal networks are Rachel Latta and Lisa Goodman. Their results echo our findings: participants in the study found that recognising and asking about abuse, in order to offer support was difficult, even for close friends. Their analysis was that 'becoming aware' of abuse was a process, which could be a long and tacit experience. Authors identified some 'collusion' between victims and friends by not explicitly acknowledging the violence they were both (at some level) aware of. Indeed, in the whole study, only one friend had actively asked whether their friend was experiencing abuse.⁸⁰ Friends were worried about naming the abuse and putting their relationship in jeopardy, and many hesitated because they were unsure of their own responsibility in intervening.

Counterintuitively, the importance of the conversation can lead to fewer people engaging, each expecting somebody else will be better placed, or more appropriate, to intervene. Other studies of bystander actions - in the context of emergency situations, rather than domestic abuse - find evidence of a 'diffusion of responsibility'. In emergency situations, the greater the number of people involved, the less likely it is that any single person will take action.⁸¹ And this is exacerbated when the situation is complex or unsure, or getting it wrong could have public ramifications.

⁸⁰ Latta RE and Goodman LA (2011) 'Intervening in Partner Violence Against Women: A Grounded Theory Exploration of Informal Network Members' Experiences' *The Counseling Psychologist* October 2011 39: 973-1023

⁸¹ There are various psychological barriers to 'helping behaviour', leading to accepted theories of 'diffusions of responsibility' in the cases of unresponsive bystanders. The public murder of Kitty Genovese, witnessed by many, with few responding, led to several social experiments to explore what stops people, who could or would always presume they would help, actually acting. Counterintuitively, the results for these experiments, found that the more people that are involved in an incident, the less likely any one person is to respond. This isn't because individuals don't care, but because of felt social influence: that any individual's behaviour changes in the presence of others, which goes some way to explain the gap between those who say they would engage, and those who actually do act. In brief, where more than one person is involved, each assumes that somebody else will handle the problem, giving them less responsibility for not acting. Other people being involved also increases an individual's concerns that if they get it wrong there will be negative social repercussions (what has been called 'evaluation apprehension'). See Latané B and Darley JM 1970 *The unresponsive bystander: why doesn't he help*. NY: Appleton-Century-Crofts. and Stürmer S & Snyder M 2010 *The psychology of Prosocial Behaviour: Group Processes, Intergroup Relationship, and Helping*. Chichester, UK/Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

“It just broke my faith in people, because everybody that I sort of trusted, everybody that I had in my life...basically when me and my kids were in the gutter no one was there.”⁸²

While it is a difficult, and delicate, enquiry to make, we know from our work in local Citizens Advice that proactively asking whether somebody is experiencing abuse makes it easier for victims to disclose than when they are not prompted. Citizens Advice have been rolling out a routine enquiry question to those who come to seek advice, asking whether they are experiencing domestic abuse, or other forms of gender-based violence. The local Citizens Advice who piloted this proactive enquiry saw disclosure rates of abuse rise almost 800 per cent.

As victims may struggle to begin the conversation, it's important friends are encouraged to overcome their anxieties and reticence, and be equipped to ask about abuse if they have concerns.

4.3 First responses: getting it right?

It's important to get the response to disclosure right. In studies with survivors, some report unintended negative consequences resulting from the misguided efforts of friends or family. Given the sensitivity and deeply personal nature of disclosure, the impact of seemingly small-scale social responses can be profound: this can be positive where someone is believed, or negative when greeted with blame, disbelief or 'cold' professionalism or neutrality. Some victims described a negative response following disclosure as feeling like being re-victimised or aggravating post-traumatic stress.⁸³

Supporters can struggle with the difficulty of knowing how to be a good friend: does it mean saying what you thought (condemning the perpetrator and saying they should leave the relationship), or listening to and respecting their friend's wishes? This might not be cut and dried; at some points victims may need practical solutions offered, at others they may simply want to talk and be believed.

Again, there isn't a great amount of evidence about responses to disclosure of domestic abuse, but a study of women's experiences in the UK and US in the 1990s, Catherine Kirkwood found only a minority of third parties were able to be open-minded and supportive during disclosure of abuse.⁸⁴ Where this did happen it

⁸² Kelly L, Sharp N and Klein R (2014) Finding the costs of freedom Solace Women's Aid

⁸³ Klein R (2014) Responding to Intimate Violence against Women: The Role of Informal Networks Cambridge University Press

⁸⁴ Kirkwood C (1993) Leaving Abusive Partners from the scars of Survival to the Wisdom of Change. London: Sage.

was welcomed, allowing the victims to “sort through their experience, develop their own understanding of it (rather than having to submit to somebody else’s interpretation), and regain sense of self.”⁸⁵

Yet many others survivors report negative or limited responses from their friends, either because they refused to believe them, or they minimised or discounted their experience, with comments like ‘all couples get into arguments’. Even if meant kindly (to normalise their experience perhaps) victims reported feeling effectively silenced by these comments. Where friends held stereotypical views that assumed emotional abuse was not serious, or that discounted the impact of jealous or possessive behaviour, interpreting it as a sign of love rather than control, this had hugely negative impacts on the survivor’s journey at a critical moment.⁸⁶

While public attitudes and understanding have undoubtedly shifted in the intervening two decades, a study of female victims leaving refuge published last year found that, while friends and family were the most significant source of support, and in many instances were enablers to rebuilding lives, for some victims they had also been harmful. One woman felt waiting for friends or family to intervene had ‘set [her] back’:

“Actually it set me back by almost two years by expecting friends, family and my networks to help in some measurable way.”⁸⁷

There is evidently still too little understanding about the realities of abuse, the difficulty victims may feel in leaving, and the damage controlling or coercive behaviours can cause.

While attitudes have hardened against the acceptability of abuse, there is still a small but significant minority of the population who believe there can be occasions where physical abuse is acceptable. The Crime Survey for England and Wales reported over a fifth of the population state that hitting or slapping their partner can be justified following an affair; 1 in 10, as a response to cheating; and 1 in 20 ‘following constant nagging or moaning.’⁸⁸ ‘Victim blaming’, particularly around gender-based violence still occurs in public discourse, in courts and in media coverage, reinforcing negative attitudes and responses to disclosure.

Assigning blame undermines supportive intervention. Several studies looking at bystander intervention in cases of sexual assault have found willingness to intervene to protect someone are lower when the victim is perceived to be at fault

⁸⁵ Klein R (2014) Responding to Intimate Violence against Women: The Role of Informal Networks Cambridge University Press

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Kelly L, Sharp N and Klein R (2014) Finding the costs of freedom. Solace Women’s Aid

⁸⁸ Crime Survey of England and Wales 2012/13 (2014) Self-completion module on intimate violence

or deserving ('unworthy) in some way.⁸⁹ Rape and domestic violence myths, misconceptions and misunderstandings, affect both bystanders' willingness to intervene, and the efficacy of their intervention.⁹⁰ In communities which place high value on honour and traditional family values, victims may fear shame or stigma.

Victims themselves have highlighted the need for education of the community at large, in order to reduce barriers to seeking help. In a study of abused women from 2003, survivors suggested disclosure would have been made easier if the public had more information about resources available, and a greater understanding of the issues that victims might be facing in extricating themselves from abuse, or the chaotic lives they were trapped in.⁹¹

As well as a greater understanding of non-physical abuse, bystanders need to be equipped to respond appropriately to disclosure.

4.4 Ongoing support can take its toll

While friends may want to do the right thing they sometimes lack the tools, understanding or energy to manage this. Latta and Goodman's in-depth study of friends and family ('network members') of victims describes their experience as draining: 'The process of continually defining and redefining their role often left network members exhausted, frustrated, and lonely. Participants in this study reiterated that they often did not know what to do, and when they did intervene, they questioned their effectiveness...all network members demonstrated a clear desire to "do the right thing", despite a lack of clarity about what that might be.'⁹² When abuse was ongoing, supporters describe moving back and forth engaging and disengaging, getting to points where they simply could not continue to see the relationship continue.

"I hadn't called or come over for weeks because she had basically insisted I try to be his friend no matter what. And I just said 'Listen I can't do that. It's only gonna get worse. I can't watch this.' I didn't go over there, she didn't call me, I didn't call her. It killed me but she

⁸⁹ http://www.edmondschools.net/Portals/3/docs/Terri_McGill/READ-Bystander%20effect.pdf Also Burn SM 2009 A situational model of sexual assault prevention through bystander intervention. Sex Roles. 60.

⁹⁰ Bohner et al 2005 The causal impact of rape myth acceptance on men's rape proclivity: comparing sexually coercive and non-coercive men. European Journal of Social Psychology. 35.

⁹¹ Lutenbacher, M., Cohen, A., & Mitzel, J (2003) Do we really help? Perspectives of abused women. Public Health Nursing, 20. 56-64.

⁹² Latta RE and Goodman LA (2011) 'Intervening in Partner Violence Against Women: A Grounded Theory Exploration of Informal Network Members' Experiences' The Counseling Psychologist October 2011 39: 973-1023

kept saying “If I have to choose one or the other, I’m gonna have to choose him.”

Many struggled with their relationship with the victim, and the perpetrator when they were asked to respect him. Friends felt frustrated by the (unexpectedly) long and uneven process of leaving abuse.⁹³

'If I saw someone close to me go through something like that it'd drive me insane'

The supporters in the study reported a general sense of a lack of resources, or difficulty locating services, to support the victim, or themselves. Given the risks and emotional complexity of intervening where abuse is occurring, being a supporter can take a toll on health and wellbeing, and supporters need information and support themselves.

There needs to be clear and accessible pathways to specialist support, not just for victims, but for their supporters too.

Because of the complexities of the issue, we need a sophisticated answer to overcoming these barriers, and making it as easy as possible for friends and family to safely and appropriately engage.

⁹³ Klein R (2014) Responding to Intimate Violence against Women: The Role of Informal Networks Cambridge University Press

5. Conclusion: supporting supporters

Engaging and supporting informal networks is a vital tool in minimising abuse, particularly in preventing abuse from escalation. However we need a clear framework which can enable third-parties to appropriately and safely engage and support victims.

5.1 A civil society campaign: “Talk About Abuse”

As we’ve seen, encouraging friends and family to engage with abuse is not as simple as telling people they should: the majority of the public believe they would engage, but there’s a gap between intention and successful interaction.⁹⁴

The public needs a framework which they can draw on to encourage them to engage. It needs to be memorable, simple and provide clear instructions of what steps to take. Essentially we need the equivalent of a ‘green cross code’ for domestic abuse, which directly addresses the barriers outlined in previous chapters. One which:

1. Details (early) signs of abuse, dispels myths and moves beyond stereotypes
2. Offers strategies for asking safely
3. Shifts some responsibility onto informal networks to ‘lean in’ and engage
4. Encourages a positive first response disclosure
5. Sign-posts to information and support, both for victims and supporters.

‘But they never hit me’

In detailing early signs of abuse, a campaign should promote understanding on emotional and financial abuse as well as physical abuse. Greater understanding would help both for bystanders and for victims themselves.

As well as a richer understanding of abusive behaviours, the campaign should reflect the realities of abuse, presenting in languages, scenarios and feelings that people recognise in day-to-day relationships. Much of the imagery and coverage of abuse depicts a hulking, and violent male, with a cowering female victim. Victims, even of physical abuse, may not recognise their relationship in those terms, and there is a task for the media in responsible and inclusive reporting. There also needs to be greater education about the complexities of survivors’ responses –

⁹⁴ The Home Office developed a typology of public attitudes towards abuse, from eyes closed (comprised of mainly perpetrators), blinkered, half-light through to enlightened (the individuals who are most vocally disapproving of abuse). However even amongst the ‘enlightened’ group, their research indicated that while aware of issues, these individual may lack confidence or motivation, and are unlikely to speak out unless serious harm is imminent.

perhaps returning repeatedly to abusive relationships – which currently can leaving supporters feeling hopeless and frustrated, or invite unhelpful criticism.

Initiatives for informal intervention could consider not solely equipping individuals, but engaging groups in common discourses, to generate a norm around appropriate behaviour. One example of this is in the US, an anti-drink driving campaign with the Slogan “Friends don’t let friends drive drunk”.⁹⁵

Bystander campaign case study

‘It’s Not OK’ was a four-year campaign in New Zealand that aimed to change attitudes towards and behaviour around domestic abuse. The campaign took the stance that we all have a role to play in keeping families safe. Their campaign had three core messages: it is ok to ask for help; it is ok to help; family violence is not ok. It was designed to be disseminated through local and community organisations, encouraging civil society to challenge domestic abuse.

A range of small-scale, community-led activities and interventions, which were tailored to engage groups of society in ways meaningful to them, were paired with consistent messages communicated via large-scale media to ensure widespread recognition and long-term behaviour change. Free, editable print resources gave anyone interested in the campaign a choice about how they could get involved.

The campaign was described by community groups, businesses, schools and government as a great success: it produced high recognition rates, caused increased conversations about family violence, and engaged with communities perceived to be particularly hard to reach. The New Zealand Police reported a 29 per cent increase in victims of abuse coming forward, partly as a result of the campaign.

Why was it effective?

1. A strong brand, with a simple tagline and artwork and message freely available to be adapted to make it relevant to each local community group.
2. A positive message: the campaign found a positive message about abuse: that it is okay to get involved, talk and seek help, and that help is available. It used a wide range of real life stories, and avoided more shocking or extreme cases. Local businesses particularly valued the

⁹⁵ Klein R (2014) Responding to Intimate Violence against Women: The Role of Informal Networks. Cambridge University Press

positive tone of the campaign when deciding to back local community initiatives which were part of the campaign: it was preferable to associate their own brand and reputation with a positive message over an accusatory one. This buy-in from businesses was essential to the campaign as it increased available funds, widened reach and added to the message that domestic abuse is everyone's business.

3. A broad target audience: the campaign targeted 'everybody', but tailored their messages to small specific groups in business and community.
4. Real stories: people also responded well to the use of real stories rather than actors
5. Collaboration: The campaign successfully crossed between larger institutions as well as community groups: it received funding from central government, help from public services as well as local community activities. The involvement of different groups of individuals was essential to the campaign's reach, and crucial element for its success, given the sensitive topic area. One component of the project - 'Many Voices' - was dedicated to developing relationships between different partners who could extend the reach of the campaign. This included sports teams, businesses or councils. Sports teams used logos on their uniforms, promoted messages courtside, and visited schools to explain their involvement. Elsewhere, youth leaders used performing arts to engage communities in preventing family violence.

Citizens Advice is launching a comparable campaign, encouraging everyone to take notice of abuse, engaging with a variety of community and national stakeholders, and situating the issue positively. We have produced a set of tools, developed with the input of specialist organisations which address these issues. Our campaign materials to 'Talk About Abuse' will be displayed across our 3,000 community locations. These tools are freely available, and we hope others - charities, business, shops, MPs, faith groups and others - choose to share the message and help spread this campaign.

Our 'Talk About Abuse' campaign approaches the problem of abuse by harnessing the will and resources available in civil society, rather than seeing this as an issue which requires a government-led policy lever. That said, there is a core role for government if they are to minimise abuse earlier on in relationships.

The Chancellor has committed to review how to provide sustainable funding for refuges and other specialist services. The review remit includes the desire to implement more prevention measures to help eliminate the need for more refuge places in the first place. Government should consider three questions as part of their review, to reduce abuse escalating in relationships.

5.2 Three questions for government to include in their review

1. How can the public recognise non-physical abuse in their or each others relationships?

Across the last four decades consecutive Governments have taken steps to articulate and criminalise domestic abuse. As our understanding has grown, so the Government's focus has broadened, from debates in the 1970s about men being violent to their wives, through to psychological, emotional and financial abuse amongst couples, under the Labour Government in 2005.

Going further, the former Coalition Government included 'coercive and controlling' behaviours in their working definition, reflecting that this type of behaviour can be a form of abuse, as well as a tactic that underpins or facilitates other forms of abuse. At the end of 2014 they announced a new criminal offence of coercive or controlling domestic abuse. Other changes - from making explicit that harm can be caused from a 'pattern' of behaviours as well as discrete incidents, that it can occur between family members as well as couples, between former partners as well as current, and regardless of gender or sexuality - expanded the definition further.

Each of these iterations is welcome. Every development better reflects the realities of abuse, is more inclusive, and illuminates how difficult it can be for a victim to seek help or leave a relationship. Yet, a broad definition of abuse in the Home Office won't be effective in preventing, minimising or responding to perpetrators, unless it has meaning for real people - unless this definition equips people to spot and challenge abuse.

Society is unsure what constitutes coercive or controlling behaviours, and lack confidence in recognising domestic abuse: we lack a working definition of abuse. As part of the review, the UK government should work with researchers, specialists and the media, as well as devolved governments, to promote a working definition of abuse that the public can recognise, building on their successful campaign targeted at young people, and current campaigns by the Welsh government. This should broaden beyond stereotypical presentations of physical abuse, to accounts which resonate with people who are actually experiencing or witnessing abuse. As part of this the government should promote information about early signs and patterns of coercive and controlling behaviour.

2. What needs amending to ensure all different parts of policy and society share a common, consistent and applicable account of abuse?

We need a common description of abuse that is applied across government (local, regional and national), and is understood by relevant services providers in both the public and private sphere. As part of the review the government should engage

with civil society institutions that have a role to play in recognising and responding to this broader account of domestic abuse.

There needs to be consistency across different policy areas, and part of civil society, about what constitutes abuse, and what support or safeguards are available for victims. Commitments from different government departments, affecting housing, benefits and legal aid, for example, must share a consistent depiction of abuse, and have common evidence requirements that are reasonable and accessible for any victim, to ensure support materialises on the ground. Legal aid must be available in practice: currently too many victims struggle to meet the evidence requirements or pay financial contributions required, and evidence requirements privilege physical above emotional or financial abuse. Housing is not always available as victims can be offered unsafe accommodation or deemed voluntarily homeless, despite abuse. Restrictions on housing benefit for under 21s must be lifted for those leaving abuse, and while Universal Credit does have exemptions for victims of abuse, it is important frontline staff in DWP are trained to promote and deliver these.

To reinforce the broad definition of abuse, members of the review must work with a cross-section of different actors, both within and outside government, to ensure that other policy areas are equipped to recognise and respond to abuse. If financial abuse, for example, is to be addressed, there needs to be collaboration with creditors and banks (including local authorities and HMRC) to develop common frameworks for recognising and responding to this form of abuse.

3. How can anybody who has concerns about abuse easily access the information, guidance or support they need?

In England there is a complex map of information and support available around domestic abuse. Even amongst our Citizens Advice network - designed for information and referral - we have struggled to map what resources are available for whom, and how to access them.

There's a good reason specialists offer tailored services to specific groups: female victims may only feel safe amongst other women; LGBT victims may worry about having to 'out' themselves; male victims can fear stigma about being a victim; and BAMER victims may have specific cultural or language needs. Local, specialist and tailored services can minimise barriers to seeking help, so there can't be a one-size-fits-all model for specialist provision.

That said, the user journey needs to be improved to ensure members of the public are able to find and access support - quickly and intuitively - whoever they are, and whatever type of abuse they may be worried about. There are nationally-funded helplines, but they are unable to answer all calls, have different opening hours, and are tailored for different audiences. Anyone should be able to easily be able to understand what counts as abuse, and whether it is a criminal offence, through to

the steps of applying for legal aid or collecting evidence.

As the UK government considers a much needed sustainable funding model for specialist services, they should also apportion funds for (further) accessible digital services around abuse. Web chat for information and support should be considered across the UK (with appropriate safety considerations). The option of asking questions or discussing a relationship online, rather than voice-to-voice, or face-to-face, may make it easier for people to seek help sooner, and this functionality should be considered in any case to free up helplines and more intensive services for those who wish or need to use them.

The review should consider whether investing in a digital 'front door' for information and advice that is well designed and inclusive⁹⁶ (but with clear signposting to specialist services for particular groups) could help support victims and friends and family with understanding their options, their risks and where they can - confidentially - get further support. While for most issues, users simply google their question to find answers (making Google the 'homepage' for most sites), given the fact that domestic abuse is a sensitive issues, with safety concerns and covering a complex web of issues, it may be valuable to have a single, well-designed 'front door' to give victims confidence in the information, the ability to browse and ask around the issue, safely and confidentially. If England did pursue a single digital front door, they could learn from the Welsh 'Live Fear Free' site, hosted by the government, but written and supported by partners across the sector, with a single helpline number, accessible for all, and open 24 hours a day.

Easy referral shouldn't just be available for victims, friends and family. The review should work with specialists, and advice services that refer onto specialists (medical professionals, social services, housing providers and so on) about how referrals could be simplified.

Given the depth and scale of the problem, we need cross-party, cross-government and cross-sector engagement to tackle the issue.

⁹⁶ Having an inclusive single digital service does not imply funding should be apportioned evenly to all services, or the services themselves should be gender neutral.

Our aims

To provide the advice people need for the problems they face.
To improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives.

Our principles

The Citizens Advice service provides free, independent, confidential and impartial advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities. We value diversity, promote equality and challenge discrimination.

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

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