

Item No.	Classification: Open	Date: 24 January 2022	Meeting Name: Health and Social Care Scrutiny Commission
Report title:	Family Early Help Response to Domestic Abuse and Violence in Families <i>(also including Children's Social Care and Youth Offending Service response)</i>		
Ward(s) or groups affected:	All		
Report author(s):	Jenny Brennan, Assistant Director, Family Early Help and Youth Justice		

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

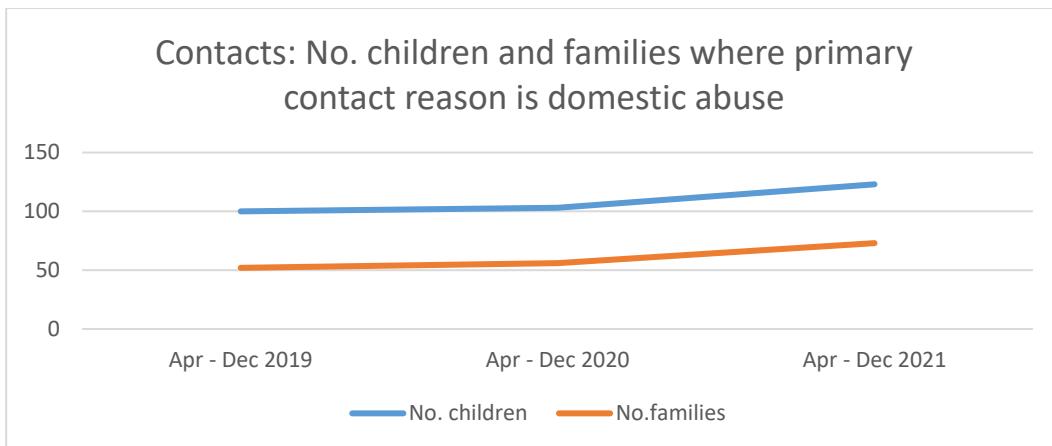
1. The council has a legal duty (Children Act 2004 S.10) to promote inter-agency co-operation to improve the welfare of all children.
2. Early help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child's life, from the foundation through to teenage years.
3. Effective early help relies upon local organisations and agencies working together to, identify children and families who would benefit from early help; undertake an assessment of the need for early help; and provide targeted early help services to address the assessed needs of a child and their family which focuses on activity to improve the outcomes for the child¹
4. The Family Early Help (FEH) service within the Children & Families Division provides targeted whole family support with referrals coming directly into the service or following the end of statutory social work as 'step-down' cases.
5. Referrals are reviewed and risk factors including domestic abuse are considered before allocation for a whole family assessment by FEH Practitioners in the Under 11 or over 11 service or Children & Family Centre (CFC) workers. Solace are present in referral and allocation meetings to advise and also accept referrals.
6. FEH has two senior practitioners who lead on reducing parental conflict and domestic abuse, acting as consultants to staff and promoting training and access to resources.

7. CFCs are part of the Safe Space initiative and all reception staff have received appropriate training to facilitate use of these spaces.
8. The parenting team in FEH has a lead on work with fathers and facilitates a fathers groupwork programme which addresses conflict and impact of conflict on children. Our Empowering Parents Empowering Communities (EPEC) hub trains parents to deliver Being a Parent Together programmes for couples where parental conflict is a concern.
9. The pilot Community Early Help Panel in the Walworth area has evidence of signposting to domestic abuse support which was accepted by the family.
10. Domestic abuse remains one of the most significant factors in the need for statutory social care intervention for children in need of help and protection, and those who come into the care of the Local Authority
11. Southwark Youth Offending Service (YOS) assessments of offenders children include screening for the presence of domestic abuse as victims from within the family. Some of these children will also be receiving statutory social work interventions.
12. The YOS also works with children who commit violence within the family against parents or siblings as either a prevention/early intervention case or where the police are prosecuting over 16s for domestic abuse.

Volume of domestic abuse work undertaken by FEH and impact of Covid

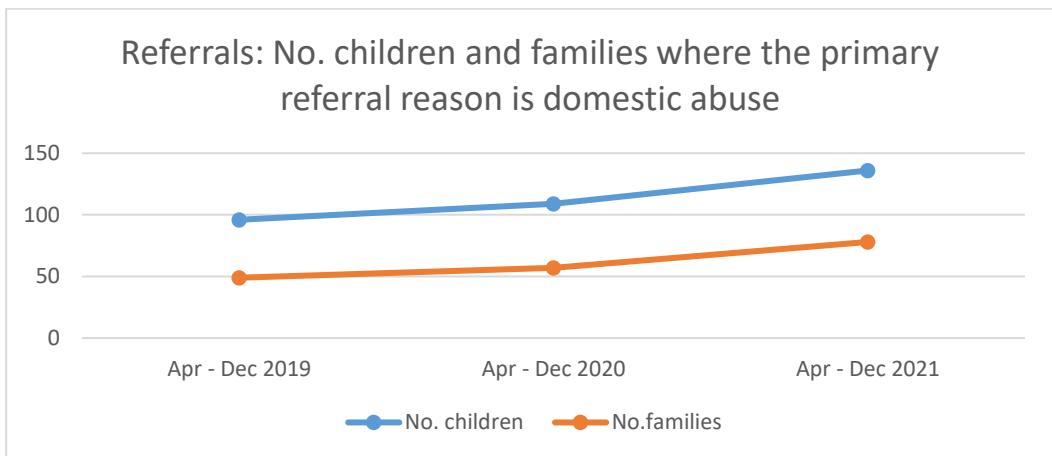
13. Comparing the period April – Dec for the last 3 years there has been a 56% increase in the number of contacts made to FEH. The proportion of contacts with primary reason of domestic violence has slightly reduced (4.4% to 3.5%) but the number of children worked with that have experienced DV has increased by 23%.

	No. contacts	No. DV contacts	% DV contacts
Apr - Dec 2019	2252	100	4.4%
Apr - Dec 2020	2324	103	4.4%
Apr - Dec 2021	3517	123	3.5%



14. Not all contacts proceed to referrals and comparing the referral data for the period April – Dec for the last 3 years there has been a 42% increase in the number of referrals worked with by Family Early Help. The proportion of contacts with primary reason of domestic violence increased by 1 percentage point in 2020 but returned to similar levels in 2021, however the number of children worked with that have experienced DV has increased by 42%.

	No. referrals	No. DV referrals	% DV referrals
Apr - Dec 2019	2147	96	4.5%
Apr - Dec 2020	2005	109	5.4%
Apr - Dec 2021	3057	136	4.4%



The data on assessments is a more accurate reflection of the presence of domestic abuse in the family rather than ‘primary reason for contact or referral’ as engagement with the family will raise other risk factors, and provide opportunities for disclosure. Approximately a third of all casework in FEH has domestic abuse as a risk factor to children.

15. The number of child assessments completed by FEH in the last 3 years (April – Dec period) show a 34% increase in work done and a slight increase in the proportion of assessments with domestic abuse present from 31 to 34% with a peak of 36% in 2020.

Assessments of children	Number of assessments with criteria recorded	Number of assessments with domestic abuse as an issue	% assessments with domestic abuse as an issue
April – Dec 2019	878	268	30.5%
April – Dec 2020	1147	407	35.5%
April – Dec 2021	1176	397	33.8%

Examples of FEH work

16. Below are examples of work undertaken by FEH with families where domestic abuse is a key risk factor for children. They are anonymized and some details are changed to prevent identification but they reflect typical work undertaken in the service.

FEH Case A - work from 2019 to support ongoing family work

A mother of a large family with significant historic involvement of Children’s Social Care due to physical and domestic abuse attended Solace support group but DVIP group was not suitable for father as he did not accept the impact of his behaviour. Work done with father and his attendance at the fathers group led to acknowledgement and accepting greater responsibility for his behaviour. He has demonstrated improved insight as he found it hard to accept there was an impact on his children when they did not directly witness violence.

Some of the children have special needs and an EHC plan. Work with all of them to address the impact of DA has been undertaken by FEH and their positive engagement in school and improvements in behaviour have been acknowledged in Team Around the Family meetings.

In this family the Safety plans are a crucial part of addressing the violence and impact whilst ensuring the children can maintain positive relationships with both parents, this includes staff exploring family culture and expectations and consistent efforts to engage with parents in a restorative change process.

FEH Case B - Referral from school Nov 2019

Large family from a country significantly affected by war. Referral to FEH by Primary school in late 2019 as mother asking for help with behaviour of child with ASD and her hitting out at siblings, and also concern from mother that she wanted her husband to be more involved in parenting of the children. During the work undertaken by FEH there was gradual disclosures by mother and the children of domestic abuse and safety planning with both parents became a focus, alongside direct work with the children.

Cultural aspects of family life, marriage and parenting were a key feature of interventions alongside collaboration with the GP, school, Solace and services for parents of children with ASD. Further disclosures of domestic abuse required ongoing safety planning, relational work with parents and the agreement for a family group conference to ensure there was a wider support network for the family. The father attended the Fathers group to help him with parenting skills but also understand the impact of conflict within the home on his children. The sustainability plan included addressing his own health needs and getting support for these to reduce his anxiety and stress.

Children & Family Centre Case D May 2021 referral for ongoing support to family

Family of 3 (pregnant mother, father and 2 year old) living with maternal grandmother and brother in overcrowded flat. Mother originally from Caribbean and father from Ghana. CSC became involved following police call out to home for allegation of grandmother threatening her daughter with a knife following disagreements over the parenting of the 2 year old.

Following a CSC assessment and a move to temporary accommodation which reduced risk, a Children & Family Centre worker was allocated to offer ongoing support.

Mother described a history of experiencing domestic abuse in her family as she was growing up and subsequent mental health needs including previous post-natal depression. Father was very engaged but a move to their own accommodation required support for their joint parenting and preparation for the new baby in Aug 2021. The CFC worker also noted some issues about the behaviour of the 2 year old and a referral for a paediatric assessment has been made.

FEH Case C - Referral from Secondary School April 20 and 2021

Family with history of domestic abuse reported in 2017 and addressed through child protection and child in need plans up to 2019. Father moved out of family home and court order in place to manage access to children.

Referral from secondary school at start of Covid April 2020 concerned about older boy, deteriorating mental health (e.g. he had not left house since school closed and obsessive compulsive behaviours), diagnosis of ASD. Significant other family caring responsibilities and housing crowded. FEH were unable to engage with mother at first and it was not until a second referral from school that she was able to share her concerns and fear of the behaviour of her sons taking her back to the 30 years of domestic abuse she had escaped from her husband.

FEH worked with mother to engage with CAMHS, LD team and school to create a safety plan for her at home and receive advice on how to manage and balance the differing needs of her children at home and older adult children. This team around the family is ensuring the different professionals are working collaboratively with mother and she feels supported but there are clear expectations on her in implementing boundaries and remaining in control. Direct sessions with the FEH worker with the mother and children focus on understanding the impact of mental health issues on each other, reinforcing parenting strategies with teenagers and ongoing focus on school attendance and engagement with education.

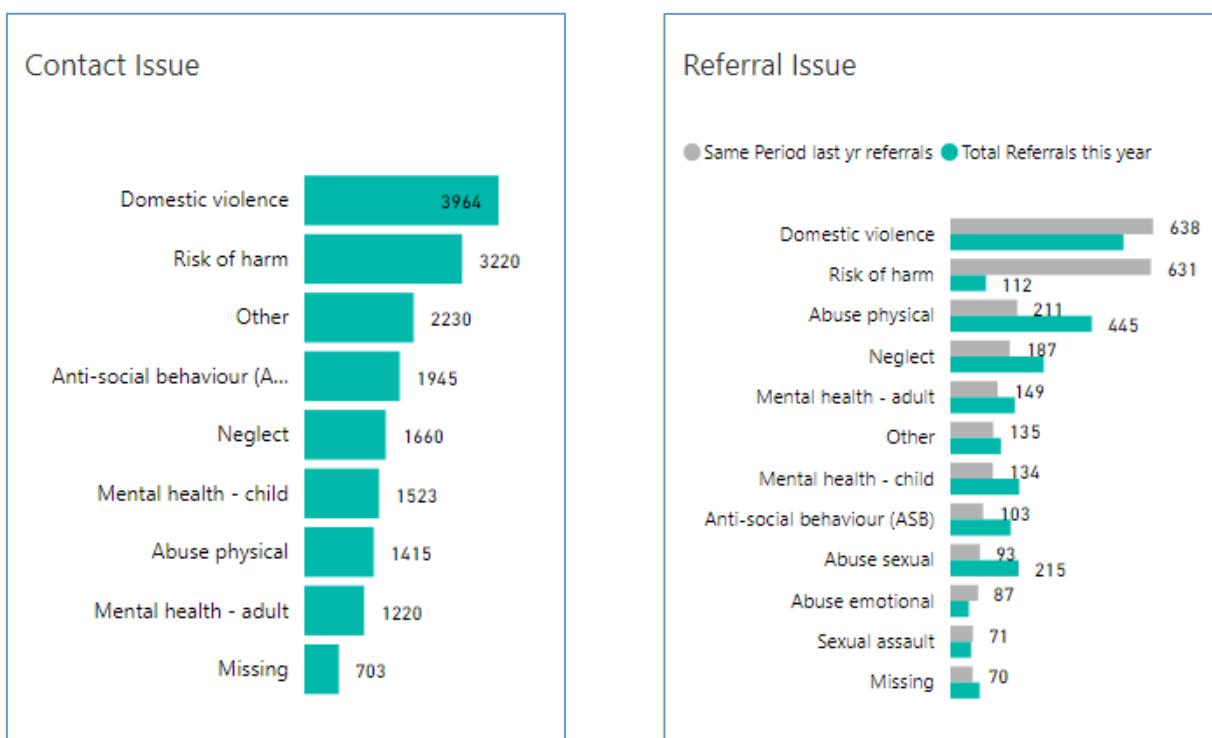
Identified gaps in provision

17. There is a gap in the support for fathers who are not suitable for the DVIP programme either owing to lack of acceptance of domestic abuse behavior, or are unable to engage with the 26 weeks. A formalised targeted engagement programme could build on the work currently undertaken by the fathers groupwork programme.
18. There is a need for increased engagement of schools with Project Encompass and promotion as part of the Team Around the Schools approach.

19. There is a need for increased capacity and training for direct work with children, whose behaviour in school may be linked to exposure to historic (or current) domestic violence, particularly models of intervention for teenagers.

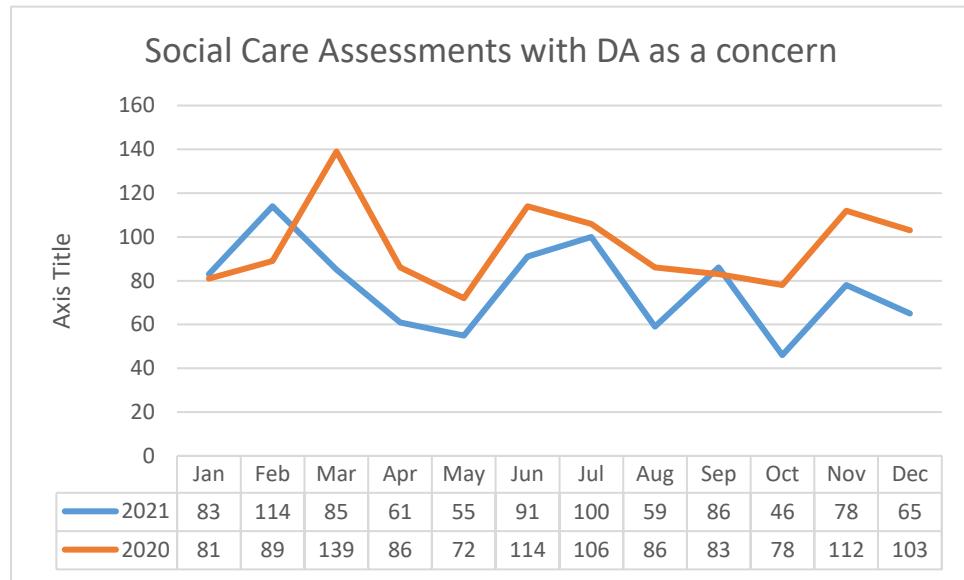
Statutory Children's Social Care intervention where domestic abuse is a concern

20. Domestic abuse is the most common factor in contacts and referrals to the social work front door, the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). In the year to date 3964 contacts have been received at the MASH where domestic abuse was identified as a concern. Of those contacts that progress to a referral for services approximately 18% of all referrals are in relation to domestic violence.



21. Domestic abuse is an issue of concern in approximately one third of all assessments undertaken by the statutory social work service. This equates to an average of between 80-90 children per month for whom domestic abuse is identified as a cause for referral to our social work teams across the last 2 full years.

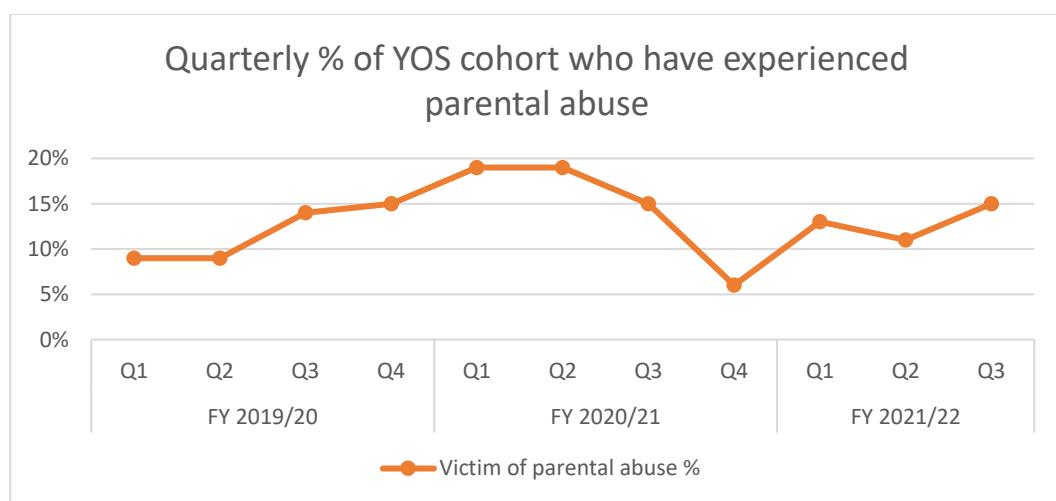
22. As was identified through nationally reported statistics there was an increase in reports of and concerns relating to domestic abuse during the period of Covid-19 lockdowns, which is evident in the assessment data for our statutory social work services in 2020.



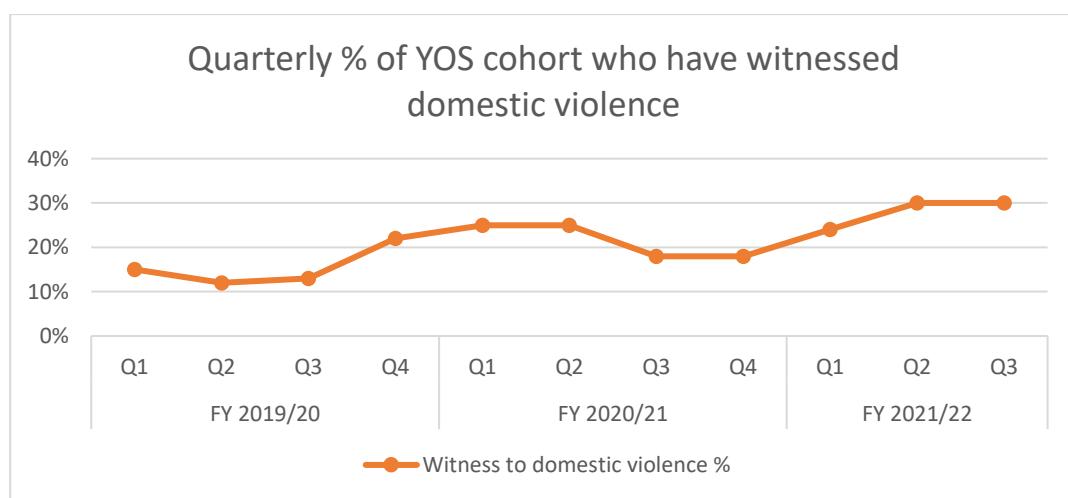
23. Statutory reporting categories for children who have entered the care of the Authority make reporting specifically on the incidence of domestic abuse leading episodes of care difficult to quantify. Analysis suggests that of the 203 children who entered care in the past 12 months 14% (29) of those children had domestic abuse identified as a concern at the time of their most recent social care assessment.
24. In most instances the statutory social work service takes positive action to support families in addressing concerns relating to domestic abuse using evidence-based interventions to support change in the home environment. This has been recognised consistently in our internal quality assurance audit procedures which routinely shows positive practice in engagement with survivors and social workers delivering effectively in partnership with mothers to create positive change where domestic abuse is a concern. Similarly in September 2020 Ofsted recognised that during the pandemic our “decisions in response to initial concerns about children, including children a increased risk from domestic abuse” are timely and proportionate.

Youth Offending Service work with domestic abuse and the impact of Covid

25. The Youth Offending Service (YOS) reports quarterly on assessment data where children on statutory orders are a victim of parental abuse or a witness to domestic violence. This data does not include prevention or diversion casework.
26. The percentage of assessments where children on the YOS caseload where children had experienced parental abuse peaked at 19% in April – Sept 2020.



27. The proportion of assessments where children have witnessed domestic violence has risen over the Covid period from 13% Oct – Dec 2019 to 30% in Oct – Dec 2021



28. The YOS case system has limited information on children who have committed violence against family members and a view that most cases are no further actioned rather than resulting in a charge. YOS police view is that there has not been an increase in arrests during Covid and School police report undertaking more prevention work in this area.
29. YOS staff including Victim and Restorative Justice workers, and the clinical team are able to work directly with children and parents to address adolescent to parent violence and aggression (APVA). There are ongoing discussions about best practice for work with APVA and the YOS are currently negotiating with Break for Change as a potential model.
30. Prevention referrals and voluntary engagement by families remain low (1 or 2 cases per month) and have not been impacted by Covid.