

Domestic Abuse in Families – draft
Health and Social Care Scrutiny Commission
April 2022

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Introduction

Definition of Domestic Abuse

Domestic Abuse (DA) is defined as 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 sex, gender or sexual orientation. The abuse can include, but is not limited to psychological, physical, sexual, financial, and emotional.

Background

In August Health and Social Care Commission completed a review, spanning two years, on 'Mental Health Inequalities of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Children and Young People'. This highlighted that Domestic Abuse had risen during the pandemic and was a significant risk factor for poor mental health in children and young people. As a result the commission decided to delve further and particularly hear from partners and community groups during the remainder of the administrative year, in order to undertake a mini review focused on Domestic Abuse in families.

Review aims

Southwark has above average levels of DA offences (police recorded) when compared to overall levels in London. Since the start of the pandemic there has been a significant increase in demand for Domestic Abuse services and an increase in Domestic Abuse reports to the police. The commission set out to look at responses from the Council, community partners and national government to the rise in Domestic Abuse during Covid-19 lockdowns, and what steps could be taken to reduce and mitigate demand.

The commission decided to look further at children acting out as a report from Oxford and Manchester Universities, received while conducting the previous review, suggested that child to parent violence had also significantly increased during lockdown. This found that the number of child to parent violent episodes increased by 70%, and that 69% of practitioners surveyed said they had seen an increase in referrals for child to parent violence. The Commission set out to understand how the police, including specialised services, are responding holistically to children, young people and families where violence is occurring.

There has been a renewed emphasis on work with Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse, with central government undertaking to publish a perpetrator strategy, as part the wider domestic abuse strategy, within 12 months of Royal Assent of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. The Commission decided to understand how the council and partners are working with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence locally.

Lastly the commission undertook to examine and improve how partners are working together to assist and protect victims and reduce offending.

Approach

Scrutiny has a unique convening power, and this was used to good effect through bringing partners together for roundtable discussion at the Commission meeting on 2 February 2022. Evidence received from this session, both written and verbal, forms the basis of this report.

Themes

Domestic abuse in Families and preventative work with children and young people

The police told the Commission that around 24% of Domestic Abuse offending is Familial.

Since the start of the pandemic in 2020 there has been increase in abuse by parents and a 50% increase of abuse by sons:



The council commissions YUVA, a service for young people using or experiencing violence in close relationships. YUVA told the commission that they work with young people aged 11 – 18 years old, or up to 25 if special needs are present, to support families and attempt to prevent further perpetrator behaviour later down the line. There is a 10 week programme for young people, and an 8 week programme for parents. They told the commission that the families they work with are often complex, with children with special needs including Autistic Spectrum Disorder. The service finds it tougher to engage with fathers, and often it is mothers who are most involved.

Presently YUVA work in Southwark two days a week. They would like to increase this and to be more connected to the wider partnership. Other partners endorsed the benefit of more work with children and young people in Southwark.

The commission heard that sons acting out can trigger mothers, where Domestic Abuse is present, and this is an area that needs focus.

Recommendations

Extend work with young people and families, including those who acting out under 16, and ensure this includes time and capacity to engage with partners.

Early focus on preventative work to prevent cycles of abuse, protect children and support mothers

The partners who gave evidence all emphasised the negative impact Domestic Abuse has children, and how the children's sense of safety is profoundly impacted by Domestic Abuse and that a Trauma Informed response is needed.

Being a victim or witnessing Domestic Abuse is an Adverse Childhood Experience that has the potential to negatively impact on children's mental and physical health throughout their life course.

The Commission's attention was drawn to the importance of Early Family Help and the [First 1000 Days](#) recommendations, a report by the Health & Social Care Select Committee, which addresses interventions to address this crucially important time period in a child's life; from conception through to age 2.

Early Intervention was mentioned by all the partners, with a general view that services tended to respond to crisis rather than sufficiently focus on prevention.

Solace provide therapeutic support for children and victims / survivors, but think that more ought to be offered.

Councillor Martha Linforth –Hall, Director of Su Mano Amiga, and member of the commission spoke about Su Mano Amiga's work with the Latin American community and Domestic Abuse. She said the community is often traumatised from conflict in the country of origin. During the first lockdown phones calls went up dramatically, however calls are now back down to the former rate. She voiced concern about children who were stuck in situations where parents are fighting, and the interventions the organisation deliver are particularly focused on children's wellbeing.

Councillor Leanne Werner; Deputy Cabinet Member for Domestic Abuse, spoke about how the new Domestic Abuse Bill is focused on breaking the cycle of violence and recognition that children need to be seen as victims not just witness .

She highlighted the work of a previous scrutiny review on Violence Against Women and Girls and the importance that young people had given to relationship skills education. Young people said that they highly valued well delivered relationship

programmes in schools, which developed emotional and social literacy, better conflict resolution skills, and the ability for girls and women to identify and address abuse and harmful behaviours and keep themselves safe. Most young people wanted more of this by trained practitioners.

There is good practice in specialist providers of these courses in schools, as well as the youth service and family support work that could be built upon, as well as content in courses deliver by Solace and the Probation services.

Recommendations

Invest in Early Help, focusing on the first 1000 days in particular, to work to protect children at this developmental important moment

Extend therapeutic support for children and adult victims/survivors

Support schools and the youth service to develop programmes that help young people to develop positive relationship skills and identify harmful behaviour, in order to keep themselves and others safe.

Work with Perpetrators and fathers

The Probation Service and Solace gave an overview of their structured programmes with Perpetrators. These work with Perpetrators to find better ways of dealing with conflict and difficult emotions, and are effective, for those who are willing to engage. The Building Better Relationships course delivered by the Probation Service looks at how to manage feelings and behaviour. It is a training programme over 5 and a half months. The course is aimed at adult male perpetrators convicted of an Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) related offence against a female partner, who present with a moderate or high risk of committing future IPV offences. There is also partner link workers who support and to look at the risk to the partners in a relationship with Perpetrator participants on the programme. Solace deliver a similar programme.

Solace and the Probation Service both emphasised the importance of these Perpetrator programmes being located in the community. A recent three borough research programme, that Solace has been engaged with, had found that connectivity between services was very important for effectiveness.

Colin Fitzgerald, who leads on Solace perpetrator programme, emphasised that the system needs to make the same demands of mothers as we make of fathers, as currently this is not symmetrical in social services. Changing this would increase the accountability of fathers and also signal to fathers their importance. He said that often fathers do not appreciate the negative impact their abuse of the mother has on their children, and that understanding this can be a trigger for change. He referenced the work of Dr David Mandel, and his 'Safe and Together' approach. Dr Mandel stresses the importance of higher expectations of men as parents.

This theme was echoed by Nicole Hooper, Deputy Manager, Bede House who agreed there was not an equal level of accountability for male perpetrators and fathers, commenting that mothers get monitored and flagged if a father attends, but there is little consequence of men. She felt the emphasis ought to be 'safe mother, safe children'.

Bede House also added that services ought to encourage more autonomy and agency in women when they devise safety plans, as women will often act compliant to service providers.

Dr Mantel has written:

Adult domestic violence survivors, instead of being treated with compassion and support, consistent with their situation, are met with blame and a "failure to protect" mentality. Domestic violence perpetrators as parents are all but ignored by systems. Responses to these families are not always child-centered, which means child safety, stability, nurturance and healing from trauma would be the guiding principles of our interventions.

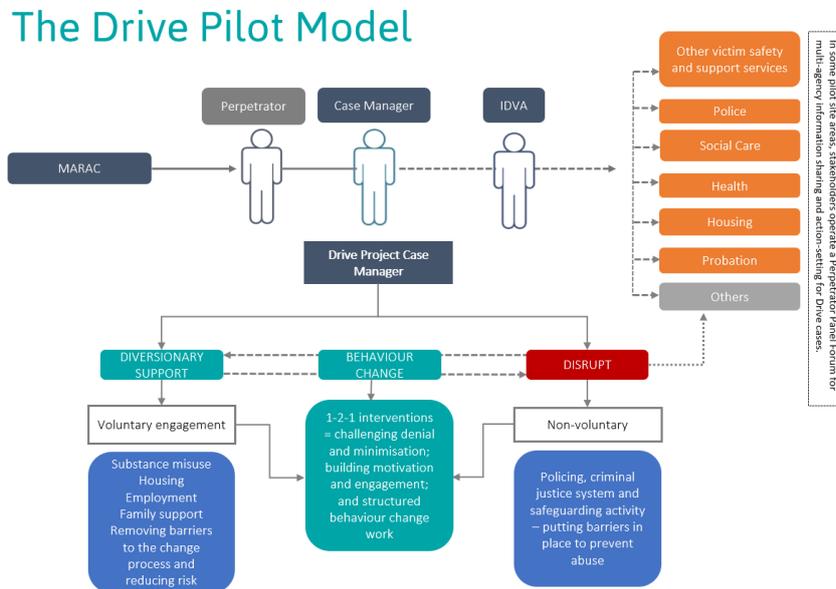
What is the result of all this? Children are being removed unnecessarily. Adult domestic violence survivors are fearful to reach out for assistance for fear of being blamed as mothers. Domestic violence perpetrators are able to take advantage of gaps in the system to increase their power over their partner and children.

The current "failure to protect" paradigm is not working. But Safe & Together works. By applying a perpetrator pattern-based approach, Safe & Together changes every aspect of child welfare domestic violence policy and practice.

Our work is grounded in the idea that, latent in child welfare systems, is the potential to be a powerful ally to adults and children harmed by a domestic violence perpetrator's behaviors. Systems are most effective when they say to the adult survivor, "We want to help you and your children be safer and healthier. Tell us what we can do to help."

Jenny Brennan, Assistant Director Family Early Help & Youth Justice spoke about the challenge of finding a model to work with fathers which enables them to stay engaged as parents while keep children and families safe. The service want fathers to parent their children, however the Assistant Director said there is a need to engage fathers and get them to change their behaviours, and provide effective support for fathers who are not suitable for the DVIP programme either owing to lack of acceptance of domestic abuse behaviour, or who are unable to engage with the 26 weeks. She suggested a targeted engagement programme could build on the work currently undertaken by the fathers group work programme.

The Commission considered a report from DRIVE, which has as its strapline 'We need to stop asking why she doesn't leave and start asking why he doesn't stop'. Their work with Perpetrators combines behaviour change programme, diversionary support, and disruption (if perpetrators do not engage), as well as ongoing support for survivors / victims.



The Drive Project launched in April 2016 and was piloted in three areas across England and Wales (Essex, South Wales and West Sussex) from 2016-2019. During this time it underwent a three-year independent evaluation conducted by the University of Bristol. The University of Bristol concluded that Drive reduces abuse and the risk Perpetrators pose.

The Commission discussed the value of the council providing relationship coaching, conflict resolution training, as well as the wider opportunities to raise awareness of consequences of abuse in society to change the culture.

Recommendation

Council:

Ensure that statutory services have the same expectations of fathers as mothers and they are held to the same standard of accountability

Provide more support to women to develop autonomy and agency over safety.

Commission courses and soft engagement programmes aimed at boys, men and fathers in particular, which promotes the importance of being a father, creating a safe environment for mothers and children, and which enables better conflict resolution and relationship skills. To enable maximum reach the Commission recommends that these are rolled out in Universal services as well as targeted services.

Consider Implementing the DRIVE programme locally.

Safeguarding Board:

Domestic Abuse is a joint priority across the Southwark Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP) and Southwark Safeguarding Adult Board (SSAB) and a task and finish group has been established.

Increase opportunities for partnership communication between stakeholders to promote connectivity of services,

Pay special attention in the partnership to the development of preventative work and follow up community work with perpetrators

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