



# DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH ANNUAL REPORT 2021

## Domestic Violence and Abuse



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## Acknowledgements

Thanks to all who participated in the domestic violence and abuse needs assessment and in compiling this report, especially those who allowed us to reflect their views and personal stories. Also particular thanks to Lucy Cunningham who led on pulling together all the information for this report.

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Thank you to the survivors and service users who shared their experiences.



If you think you or someone you know may be experiencing domestic abuse, go to [reducingtherisk.org.uk/Buckinghamshire](https://reducingtherisk.org.uk/Buckinghamshire) for support and advice.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

**This year my Director of Public Health Annual Report focuses on domestic violence and abuse.**

One in 20 adults are estimated to experience domestic abuse every year equating to almost 21,000 people a year in Buckinghamshire or 57 people every day. Women are more commonly victims of domestic abuse than men but it can happen to anyone, at any age, across all gender identities, ethnic groups and walks of life.

Domestic abuse is a crime often hidden from view, at home and out of sight. It often goes unreported, as victims and witnesses such as children in the family may not report abuse for many different reasons. Surveys suggest fewer than one in five women experiencing domestic abuse report it to police. On average it takes three years for victims of domestic abuse to access support services.

Domestic abuse has a profound impact on victims and survivors, their family and wider society. Domestic abuse causes poor physical and mental health both in the short and long term, and in some extreme cases death. There are also serious consequences for children in the household witnessing domestic abuse with impacts on their mental and physical health, safety and educational attainment. Domestic abuse also contributes significantly to homelessness and increases the risk of poverty for victims and their children. The Home Office estimates that the economic and social costs of domestic abuse are over £66 billion in England and Wales.

The prevalence of domestic abuse was vividly highlighted during the Covid-19 pandemic. During and following the first lockdown, data up to January 2021 showed a 15% increase in domestic abuse crimes reported to police for Buckinghamshire with a 13% increase in known victims and perpetrators. Service data showed an increase in demand for domestic abuse support services.

Ending domestic abuse is everyone's business and requires a co-ordinated response from national government, local partners and the public.

This report is informed by a needs assessment undertaken by Buckinghamshire Council, views from victims and service users, frontline professionals and organisations in Buckinghamshire. It covers key areas including how to recognise signs of domestic abuse and where to get help, who may be at greater risk of experiencing abuse and when, including research on the warning signs leading up to domestic homicides. It also covers what is known about interventions that contribute to reducing the risk and harms of domestic abuse and the need for more work to focus on preventing perpetrators from committing domestic abuse. The Domestic Abuse Bill 2021 was recently passed in April and will also inform local actions. My report makes recommendations based on our local situation for a range of partners in Buckinghamshire to implement.

Finally I would like to thank all those who participated in the needs assessment and in compiling this report, especially those who allowed us to reflect their views and personal stories. I hope that the coming years will see us make very significant progress in reducing domestic abuse in Buckinghamshire and offering effective support to all those affected.

**Dr Jane O'Grady**  
**June 2021**

## 2. WHAT IS DOMESTIC ABUSE AND HOW CAN WE RECOGNISE IT?

### What is Domestic Abuse?

The Domestic Abuse Bill (2021) sets out a new statutory definition of domestic abuse that covers both the nature of the relationship and the range of behaviours that are considered abusive.<sup>1</sup>

It says that **behaviour is abusive** if it consists of any of the following:

1. Physical or sexual abuse.
2. Violent or threatening behaviour.
3. Controlling or coercive behaviour.
4. Economic abuse.
5. Psychological, emotional or other abuse.

The behaviour can consist of a single incident or ongoing behaviour.

Domestic abuse can take place in different types of relationships, it can be between family members, ex-partners and people not living together. The definition refers to people aged 16 or over, but the Bill says that children can still be victims. If the abuser directs his/her behaviour at a child in order to be abusive to another adult, this is domestic abuse (see appendix for full definition).



For women, coercive control has been shown to be the most common, and the most dangerous context of abuse.

There were 24,856 offences of coercive control recorded by the police in the year ending March 2020 in England and Wales.<sup>2</sup> It is defined as "*...assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim*". This can also include stalking, which is a pattern of persistent and unwanted attention. For women, coercive control has been shown to be the most dangerous context of abuse.<sup>3</sup>

“In middle class suburbia, there's a culture of things being hidden. It's humiliating to admit you're going through something like this.”

- Victim of domestic abuse, Buckinghamshire

## How can we recognise signs of domestic abuse?



Recognising domestic abuse is the first step to taking action.

Recognising domestic abuse is the first step to taking action. Some victims as well as their friends, family and colleagues may not recognise or acknowledge the abuse. There are resources available to help us all recognise domestic abuse,<sup>4</sup> and to respond effectively as a positive bystander so that we can assist victims safely.<sup>5</sup>

Signs that someone may be a victim of domestic abuse include:

- Being withdrawn.
- Becoming isolated from family and friends.
- Having bruises, burns or bite marks.
- Having finances controlled.
- Not being allowed to leave the house, or stopped from going to college or work.
- Having internet, social media or other communications monitored.
- Being repeatedly belittled, put down or told they are worthless.
- Being told that abuse is their fault, or that they are overreacting.

Children may respond to experiencing and/or witnessing abuse in different ways. Signs in children include:

- Being anxious, depressed or withdrawn, easily startled.
- Having difficulty sleeping, having nightmares or flashbacks.
- Complaining of physical symptoms such as tummy aches.
- Bed wetting.
- Developing behavioural problems e.g. temper tantrums and problems in school, behaving as though they are much younger than they are, becoming aggressive.
- Having a lowered sense of self-worth.
- Older children playing truant, using alcohol or drugs, or self-harming.
- Developing an eating disorder.
- Feeling angry, guilty, insecure, alone, frightened, powerless or confused.
- Having ambivalent feelings towards both the abuser and the non-abusing parent.

“ It took me a long time to realise there was a problem and therefore to seek help. I felt that it wasn't bad enough to be abuse because he wasn't hitting me. ”

- Victim of domestic abuse, Buckinghamshire

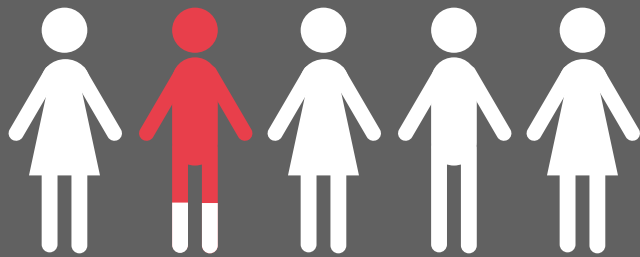
### 3. HOW COMMON IS DOMESTIC ABUSE?

#### Victims

Data on domestic abuse comes from several sources. The Crime Survey for England and Wales and national police data on recorded crime are analysed and published by the Office for National Statistics. Local data from Thames Valley Police is available to inform what is happening in Buckinghamshire.

We can also use national and local data on use of domestic abuse services to determine who is using services.

The current data have limitations. Domestic abuse often goes unreported and, when it is reported, there can be a lack of detail about the type of abuse suffered and the characteristics of people involved e.g. ethnicity. For example, fewer than one in five women (17%) who had experienced partner abuse in the year to March 2018 reported the abuse to the police.<sup>6</sup>



Fewer than one in five women (17%) who had experienced partner abuse in the year to March 2018 reported the abuse to the police.

For the year to March 2020 in England and Wales<sup>7</sup> we know that:

- One in 20 adults aged 16 to 74 years reported experiencing domestic abuse in the year to March 2020 (ONS).
- There were approximately 1.28 million recorded domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes.
- Twice as many women experienced some form of domestic abuse as men.
- Women aged 16 to 19 years were more likely to report being a victim of domestic abuse than women in all other age groups. 14% of women in this age group said that they had experienced any domestic abuse.
- For men, the age group most likely to report being a victim of domestic abuse was also 16 to 19 years old. 5% of men of this age said that they had experienced any domestic abuse.
- People with a disability were more likely to experience domestic abuse than people without a disability.

- Unemployed people were more likely to have experienced domestic abuse than those who were employed or economically inactive.
- People living in a single-parent household were more likely to experience domestic abuse.
- People in the Mixed ethnic group were more likely to experience domestic abuse compared to other ethnicity categories (Asian/Asian British, Black/Black British, White and Other).
- Women in the lowest household income bracket are four times more likely to report being victims of domestic abuse.<sup>8</sup>
- There were 357 domestic homicides between 2017 and 2019.<sup>9</sup> Men committed 86% of all domestic homicides. The victim was female in 77% of domestic homicides cases. The suspect was male in 96% of female homicides and 53% of male homicides.

We also know from research in England and Wales that:

- Women experience more of certain types of abuse: more repeated physical violence, more severe violence, more sexual violence, more coercive control, more injuries and more fear of their partner compared to men.<sup>10</sup>
- 91% of domestic violent crimes causing injuries are against women.<sup>11</sup>
- 83% of victims experiencing more than ten violent crimes are women.<sup>11</sup>



Domestic abuse affects an estimated 21,000 adults in Buckinghamshire each year, or 57 people every day.

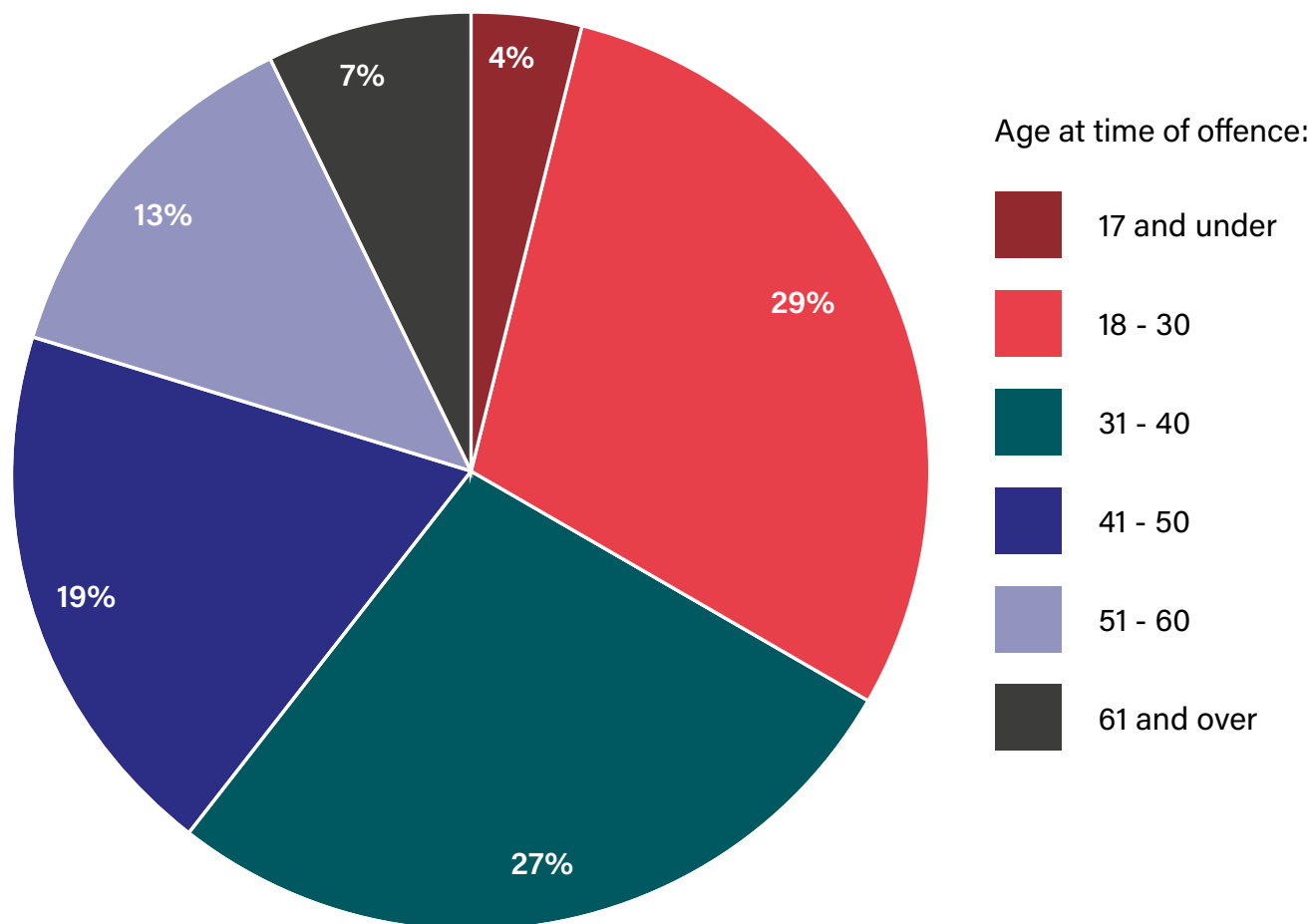
Domestic abuse data for Buckinghamshire tell us the following:

- Domestic abuse affects an estimated 21,000 adults in Buckinghamshire each year, or 57 people every day.
- Police data for Buckinghamshire from 2020 to 2021 showed that:
  - Only around 4,000 victims of abuse were recorded. This reflects a known pattern of under-reporting of domestic abuse for all victims.
  - More victims are female (71%) than male.
  - Over half of victims (56%) are aged between 18 and 40 years of age.
- Between 2011 and 2020, there were 15 domestic homicides in Buckinghamshire and 39 across the Thames Valley area.

It's more difficult to tell people that you're a victim of abuse if you're male - it's too shameful and embarrassing.

- Victim of domestic abuse, Buckinghamshire

Age of victim at time of abuse. Buckinghamshire data as recorded by Thames Valley Police, April 2020 to Jan 2021



A local needs assessment (2019) found that domestic abuse services in Buckinghamshire compare well to gold standard guidance from the National Institute for Health and Social Care Excellence (NICE).<sup>12</sup> For example, the county has the recommended number of independent domestic violence advisers (IDVAs) for its population size. Local domestic abuse service data add to our knowledge of domestic abuse.<sup>a</sup> Understanding who is (and who isn't) using services can inform service planning, commissioning, and delivery.

Data collection in these services can be challenging and sensitive, and therefore service data are often incomplete. However, comparing the data we have with national estimates suggests that some groups may be under-represented in service users. These groups include, but may not be limited to: men, older people, ethnic minorities, disabled people and people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or have another definition of their gender and sexuality (LGBT+). This under-representation may reflect the fact that not all victims want to seek help, and/or that services are not meeting the needs of these groups.

<sup>a</sup> *Women's Aid Bucks provides domestic abuse services in Buckinghamshire, including independent domestic violence advice (IDVA), outreach services and refuge space.*



## Perpetrators



Less is known about the people who carry out domestic abuse than their victims.

Less is known about the people who carry out domestic abuse than their victims. It is vital that we understand more about perpetrators if we are to understand how to prevent abuse and change their behaviour.

Whilst data are limited,<sup>13</sup> one report suggested that there are around 400,000 perpetrators in England and Wales causing high and medium levels of harm.<sup>14</sup> Perpetrators are more often a partner or ex-partner rather than a family member.<sup>15</sup> They are more likely to be male. Male perpetrators are more likely to seriously injure or kill their victim; of the 357 domestic homicides committed in England and Wales between 2017 and 2019, 86% were committed by men.<sup>16</sup>



3,212 perpetrators committed 4,431 domestic abuse crimes.

From Thames Valley Police data for Buckinghamshire (10 months to January 2021), we know that:

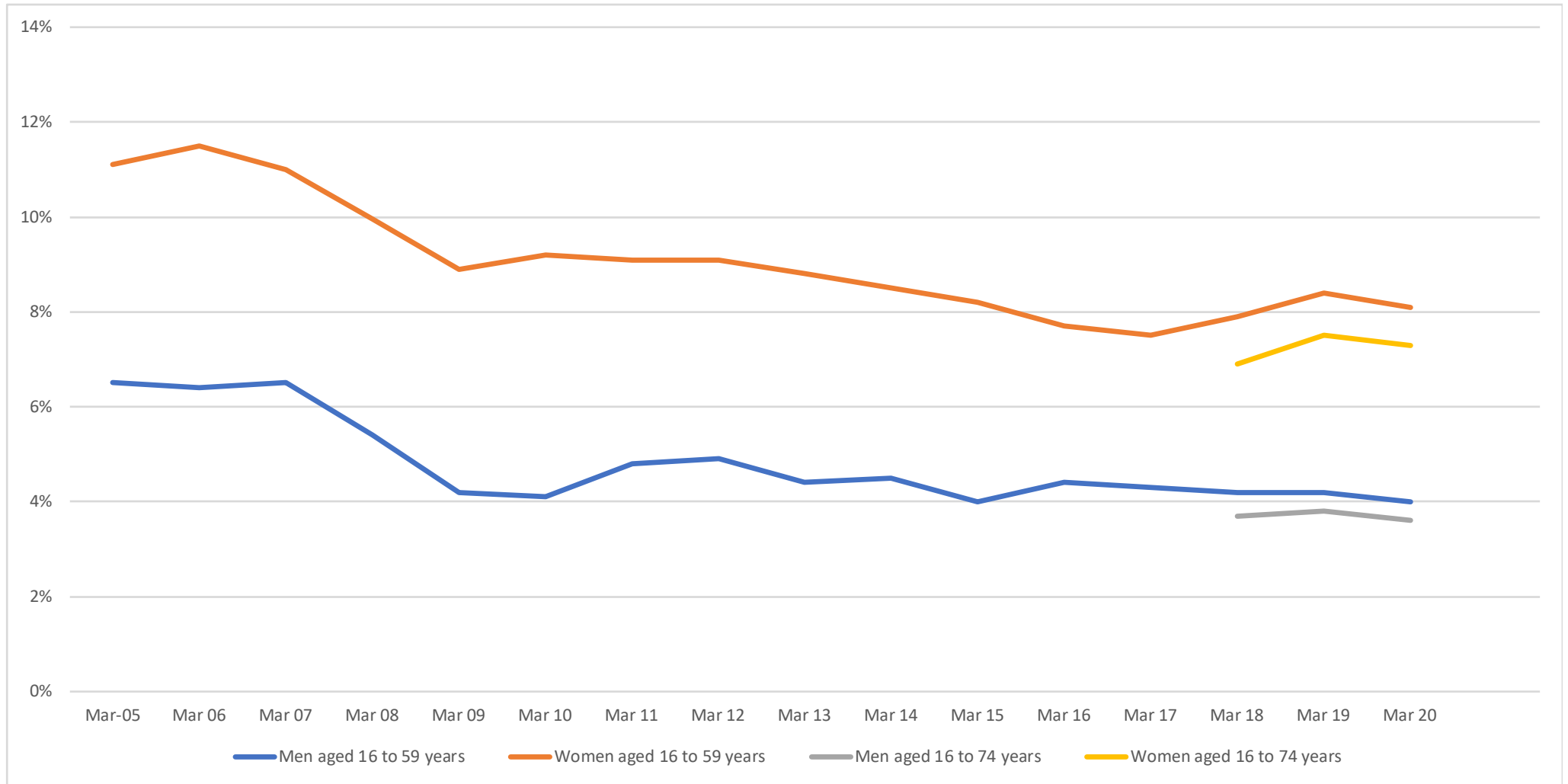
- There were 3,212 perpetrators who committed 4,431 domestic abuse crimes (Thames Valley Police data for Buckinghamshire, April 2020 - January 2021).
- 72% of perpetrators of known gender were male.
- 64% of perpetrators of known age were 40 years old or under.

Perpetrators can be children as well as adults. Research and local professionals tell us that teen-to-parent and teen-to-teen domestic abuse occurs locally.

## Trends over time

Crime Survey for England and Wales data show fewer people experiencing domestic abuse over time, from 2005 to 2020.

**Percentage of adults reporting domestic abuse in the annual Crime Survey, England and Wales, 2005 to 2020.<sup>17</sup>**



Despite the gradually decreasing rates of domestic abuse reported in surveys, there was a 9% increase in domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes reported to police from 2019 to 2020 in England and Wales. This may relate to changes in police recording or may reflect a true increase in reporting to the police.



Domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes accounted for 15% of all crime in Buckinghamshire from 2019 to 2020.

In Buckinghamshire, these crimes accounted for 15% of all recorded crime from 2019 to 2020, 14% of all crime from 2018 to 2019, and 11% of all crime from 2017 to 2018.

The Covid-19 pandemic saw a significant increase in reported domestic abuse. During the first lockdown (March to June 2020), police data showed a 7% increase<sup>b</sup> in domestic abuse related offences.<sup>18</sup> In the 10 months from April 2020, contacts to the National Domestic Abuse charity Refuge<sup>19</sup> rose by 61% and contacts to the charity Respect which supports male victims of domestic abuse rose by 70%.<sup>20</sup> Calls to the National Stalking Helpline in the year from March 2020 increased by almost 10%.<sup>21</sup> The lockdown resulted in victims being confined at home with perpetrators. School closures may have increased exposure of children to household violence. In-person contact with health and social services reduced. And home visits which may have identified and intervened in risky situations were reduced. Victims reported that the abuse worsened during the pandemic, especially if they lived with their abuser.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>b</sup> As the number of offences flagged as domestic abuse-related has been increasing in recent years, it is not possible to determine what impact the coronavirus pandemic may have had on the increases in 2020.



The Covid-19 pandemic saw a significant increase in reported domestic abuse.

Victims reported that the abuse worsened during the pandemic, especially if they lived with their abuser.

In Buckinghamshire, reports of domestic abuse and use of domestic abuse services have increased since the start of the pandemic. The table shows increases in police and service use data.

<b>POLICE DATA</b>	<b>Before Covid-19 April 2019 to Jan 2020</b>	<b>After Covid-19 April 2020 to Jan 2021</b>	<b>Percentage change</b>
<b>Reported domestic abuse crimes</b>	3849	4431	15% ↑
<b>Numbers of victims</b>	2924	3291	13% ↑
<b>Numbers of perpetrators</b>	2839	3212	13% ↑
<b>Domestic-related stalking crimes*</b>	54*	415*	669% ↑*
<i>*Large increase is due to changes in recording practises by the Home Office in April 2020.</i>			
<b>SERVICE DATA</b>	<b>Before Covid-19 April to Sept 2019</b>	<b>After Covid-19 April to Sept 2020</b>	<b>Percentage change</b>
<b>Victims supported by IDVAs<sup>c</sup></b>	601	1062	77% ↑

<sup>c</sup> This includes victims supported within a police station and/or within Women's Aid IDVA services in Buckinghamshire.

# I never expected domestic abuse would happen to me

"I always thought that domestic violence and abuse was something that happened to other people. But it happened to me. This is my story from ten years ago.

"He will be nameless. We met online, but we had mutual acquaintances in common, so I felt okay about meeting him. We first met in a quiet local pub - he wasn't really my type, and I only agreed to a second date to not hurt his feelings. However after meeting more, I felt that we had a connection. We ended up moving in together quite quickly and that's when my life began to change.

"From the start he was 'love bombing' me, a tactic that abusers sometimes use to get you on side - sending texts saying that he really liked me, and thought I was amazing. He was also controlling and overbearing - my phone would ring and he would be hovering, wanting to hear what I was saying. He would question me - what did they want, why had or hadn't I spoken about him? Then there were questions about why people weren't ringing or texting me. I felt that I couldn't do anything right.

"Things reached a head when I stayed away overnight for a work trip. He accused me of making it up - I was going away because I was having an affair (I wasn't). He cornered me in our bedroom, pushing me against the wall, yelling and screaming at me. In his mind, he was right - I couldn't say anything to stop him. I'm not proud of it, but I slapped him. Silence. Nothing happened. I got my bags and I left. For the next 36 hours I had text after text saying things like the police would arrest me, he was sorry, please come back, I love you, I need you, why aren't you telling me the truth, don't you dare come back, your stuff is in bin bags at the front door.

"You might wonder, why I didn't ring someone and tell them? What do you say? Who do you tell? Abusers pull you away from your friends and family. Contact becomes limited, and often you can't see people without the abuser being present. Unless you've been in this position, you can't imagine how lost and alone you feel. Reaching out to talk to someone, becomes the most impossible thing you can do.

"Christmas came. I was trapped in a flat, with a man I was petrified of. We rowed, and by 4am, he had ripped out clumps of my hair, tried to strangle me, kicked me in the ribs, given me a black eye, and ripped an earring out my ear. He proposed at some point that night. I said yes because I didn't know what else to say. It was terrifying. I couldn't even cry. I just felt numb.

"It was another three weeks before I left, and I can't tell you what happened. I don't let myself think about it. But I did leave. And I didn't go back."

- Anonymous resident, Buckinghamshire

## 4. WHO IS AT GREATER RISK OF SUFFERING DOMESTIC ABUSE?

Some people are more likely to be victims of domestic abuse. Tools such as the DASH risk checklist (Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment and Honour Based Violence) help trained health and social care professionals and the police to assess the risk level (standard, medium or high) of domestic abuse victims.<sup>23</sup> The checklist identifies vulnerabilities such as mental ill health, financial dependency and disability. High and medium risk victims receive support from independent domestic violence advisors (IDVA), and may be referred to a multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC).

However, a lack of complete data on victims limits our understanding of the full picture of who is at greater risk of domestic abuse. Much of our data come from surveys or services. A lack of data may reflect reluctance to provide information, poor data collection, or barriers to accessing services, either because services are not inclusive or are not perceived to be.

### Disability



Around 14% of disabled adults experienced domestic abuse, compared with 5% of adults without disabilities from 2018 to 2019 (in England and Wales).

Around 14% of disabled<sup>d</sup> adults experienced domestic abuse, compared with 5% of adults without disabilities from 2018 to 2019 (in England and Wales).<sup>24</sup> Disabled men are twice as likely to experience domestic abuse compared to non-disabled men (8% and 4% respectively);<sup>25</sup> disabled women are more than twice as likely compared to non-disabled women (17% and 7%). National and local data suggest that either disability is not recorded by services, or that disabled victims are not accessing them.

“ Having a physical disability meant that it was difficult for me to get advice or support outside home. ”

- Victim of domestic abuse, Buckinghamshire

### Learning disability

National data suggest that one in five (19%) people with a learning disability experienced any domestic abuse in the last year (2019 to 2020).<sup>26</sup>

<sup>d</sup> *Being disabled refers to a person self-reporting a long-standing illness, condition or impairment, which causes difficulty with day-to-day activities.*

## Mental ill health

Domestic abuse and mental ill-health are commonly associated. Recent research suggests that women with mental health problems are three times more likely to experience domestic abuse, and women experiencing domestic abuse are three times more likely to develop mental health problems.<sup>27</sup>

## Older people

Older people are affected by domestic abuse. Police data for Buckinghamshire from 2019 to 2020 showed that 9% of victims of known age were 61 years or older. However this age group only made up 4.5% of IDVA service users in the same year. Older people may be more vulnerable to coercive control (including economic abuse) given their dependence on family and carers as they age.<sup>28</sup> They may be unwilling or unable to disclose, recognise or leave abusive relationships due to age-related conditions such as dementia. Such situations are both a safeguarding and a domestic abuse concern.

## Ethnicity

Ethnicity is not well recorded in relation to domestic abuse. Recent police data show that in Buckinghamshire, in 70% of cases the victim's ethnicity was not recorded. Domestic abuse is also commonly under-reported in ethnic minorities. Although domestic abuse is experienced by people from all ethnic origins, cultural values and norms will affect people's perceptions of and responses to domestic abuse. For people from some ethnic minority backgrounds, these may include fear (of not being believed, of being exposed, of the criminal justice system), victim-blaming culture, and failure to recognise abuse. Honour and shame are highly important concepts in certain cultures, and the consequences of dishonouring family or community by disclosing abuse are significant.

I will live with the abuse rather than get divorced.  
Divorce in my culture means my life is over.

- Quote from Thames Valley BAMER Project Report



Honour and shame are highly important concepts in certain cultures, and the consequences of dishonouring family or community by disclosing abuse are significant.

The Thames Valley Black, Asian, minority ethnic and refugee (BAMER) Project Report identified barriers faced by women from ethnic minorities who experience abuse. For example a victim needing a family member to interpret at appointments is denied privacy to discuss abuse with the health or social care professional.<sup>29</sup>



English isn't my first language so I use language translation apps when I meet with different workers - it's not perfect but it works.



- Victim of domestic abuse, Buckinghamshire

## Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities

There are limited data around domestic abuse in the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. However, as in other communities, community members and workers have noted domestic abuse as a serious and long-standing problem.<sup>30</sup> The domestic abuse charity One Voice 4 Travellers estimated as many as three in four women from these communities experience domestic abuse at some point in their lives.<sup>31</sup>

## Sexual orientation and gender identity

National statistics do not report domestic abuse by sexual orientation or gender identity. However, studies suggest that between 25 and 40% of lesbian, gay and bisexual people report one or more domestic abuse incidents in their lifetime. This rises to between 28% and 80% for trans people.<sup>32</sup> An NSPCC survey in UK schools suggested that 44% of teenagers with same-sex partners had experienced some form of physical partner violence, increased from 20% for those in heterosexual relationships.<sup>33</sup>

Domestic abuse victims with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or another definition of their gender and sexuality identity (LGBT+) are known to present with higher levels of risk and complex needs compared to non-LGBT+ people, such as mental health problems, self-harm and drug and alcohol misuse.<sup>34</sup>



LGBT+ victims may face threats of 'outing' about sexual orientation and gender identity.

They also face unique issues such as being victim to threats of 'outing' about sexual orientation and gender identity, and 'identity abuse' which may include withholding of medication or clothing relating to their identity.<sup>35</sup>



Most of my friends and family didn't know I was gay so I didn't want to drop a double bomb-shell on them by telling them I was also being abused by my partner.



- Victim of domestic abuse, Buckinghamshire



## 5. WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS FOR BECOMING A PERPETRATOR?

Certain factors are associated with increased risk of perpetrating domestic abuse. They may not cause the abuse to happen, but they contribute. Risk factors can be cumulative, and combine to increase the risk of committing domestic abuse.<sup>36</sup>

Greater risk is associated with low self-esteem, hostility towards women, and/or the need for dominance and control. A history of depression and suicide attempts have also been linked to increased risk of becoming a perpetrator. Where economic stress, marital conflict and/or jealousy occurs, domestic abuse is more likely. Additionally, evidence suggests that communities with lower social cohesion, lower bystander intervention, and lower social capital have higher rates of intimate partner violence.

In contrast, protective factors can reduce the influence of risk factors. Good physical and mental health and a sense of wellbeing are protective against perpetrating abuse.

Good physical and mental health and a sense of wellbeing are protective against perpetrating abuse.

Having a stable home and family life are also protective. Communities with greater social cohesion, good access to healthcare and knowledge and training of bystander interventions have reduced risk of domestic abuse. Social norms that discourage violence and support gender equality, and public policy that aims to level up health inequalities are also protective.<sup>37</sup>

To illustrate the interplay between risk and protective factors, a recent study with domestic abuse practitioners showed common risk and protective factors associated with becoming a perpetrator.<sup>38</sup> For example, normalising abusive behaviour was a risk factor. Protective factors included having meaningful support networks. Understanding these multilevel factors can help identify various opportunities for prevention. For example, improving access to stable housing, and promoting bystander interventions to reduce the risk of domestic abuse.

It was useful - I learnt how to put myself in my partner's shoes and to see things from her perspective.

I wouldn't have done this unless I'd been forced to. There should be more help and advice like this to help men before they get into a criminal situation like I did.

- Perpetrators of domestic abuse in Buckinghamshire reflecting on their attendance at a positive relationships programme

## 6. WHEN IS SOMEONE MORE AT RISK OF DOMESTIC ABUSE?

There are certain times when abuse may be more severe or more frequent.

### Pregnancy and postnatal period

International estimates suggest that between four and nine of every 100 pregnant women are abused during pregnancy or soon after birth.<sup>39</sup>



Pregnancy is associated with an increased risk of domestic abuse.

Pregnancy is associated with an increased risk of domestic abuse and also changes to the pattern of abuse.<sup>40</sup> The time of greatest risk is thought to be the postnatal period. Estimates suggest that between 290 and 650 Buckinghamshire women may be affected by domestic abuse each year when pregnant or in the postnatal period. Midwives and Health Visitors are aware of the potential for domestic abuse and screen patients carefully, seeking specialist help as appropriate. Local domestic abuse services support pregnant and postnatal women.

### Drug and alcohol use

Drug and alcohol use can decrease inhibitions, act as a catalyst, and may lead to violence to solve conflicts in intimate partner relationships.<sup>41</sup> In the Crime Survey for England and Wales (2018) victims reported that the perpetrator was under the influence of alcohol in 17% of cases and drugs in 11% of cases. Victims were under the influence of alcohol (8%) and drugs (2%) less often at the time of abuse.<sup>42</sup> Recent police data for Buckinghamshire show that nine in ten perpetrators were not using alcohol at the time of the offence.

## Separating or fleeing from perpetrator



Leaving - and shortly after leaving - an abuser is a dangerous time for the victim.

Leaving an abuser is a dangerous time. The risk of further abuse can increase as and after the victim leaves. One study explored post-separation violence, and found three in four women suffered further abuse, and one in three women suffered continued post-separation violence.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, 37 of the 91 women killed by a male partner in the UK in 2018, had either separated or were taking steps to separate from their partner. Eleven of the 37 women were killed in the first month of separation.<sup>44</sup>

### Football matches

Studies in England have shown significant increases in the number of domestic abuse cases recorded by the police when the men's national team are involved in significant football matches, both when they win, and even more so when they lose.<sup>45</sup> A recent study showed that England football success in international tournaments also increased the likelihood of alcohol-related violent behaviours in the home.<sup>46</sup> A London hospital reported a 200% referral increase to its domestic abuse support service during the 2014 men's football World Cup.<sup>47</sup> The Women's Aid campaign 'Football United Against Domestic Violence' aims to raise awareness of domestic abuse, and battle sexist attitudes that underpin abuse against women. Wycombe Wanderers are one of the football clubs that supports this campaign.<sup>48</sup>

## 7. WHAT ARE THE IMPACTS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE?

Experiencing and witnessing domestic abuse can have devastating impacts on victims, and their children, friends and wider family. There are also wider societal impacts. Tools such as the DASH risk checklist help trained health and social care professionals to identify the risk of harm victims may be facing.

### Victim's health



Harm as a result of domestic abuse can have lifelong impacts on physical, mental and sexual health.

Harm as a result of domestic abuse can have lifelong impacts on physical, mental and sexual health. The more severe the abuse, the greater the impact. In the worst cases, domestic abuse can result in homicide, including suicide as a result of domestic abuse.

One in five domestic abuse victims at high risk of serious harm or murder reported attending an accident and emergency department because of their injuries in the year before getting help. Abuse can also result on long term health problems.

A study interviewing women and girls over 15 years old found that those who had experienced physical or sexual violence by a partner were more likely to report overall poor health, chronic pain, memory loss, and problems walking and carrying out daily activities.<sup>49</sup>

Sexual violence can lead to infections, chronic pelvic pain, sexually transmitted infections, unintended and unwanted pregnancies, and abortions.<sup>50</sup>

Alcohol and drugs can be used by the victim as a way of coping or self-medicating, putting victims at risk of further ill health.<sup>51</sup> Their effects may also leave victims less capable of negotiating resolution and at risk of further violence.

Domestic abuse and mental ill health are commonly associated. A recent study found that half of women presenting to their GP with domestic abuse had already had some form of diagnosed mental illness.<sup>52</sup> Victims experience anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, inability to trust others, flashbacks, eating and sleeping disorders, and emotional detachment.<sup>53</sup> Considering or attempting suicide has been reported in 16% of victims, and self-harming in 13% of victims.<sup>54</sup> An estimated one in three women who attempt suicide in the UK have experienced domestic abuse.<sup>55</sup>

Domestic abuse affects all areas of life, as well as poor health.

## Housing and homelessness



Domestic abuse is a leading driver of homelessness. Latest national figures from 2020 show that domestic abuse was the second most common reason given for losing a home.

Domestic abuse is a leading driver of homelessness. Latest national figures from 2020 show that domestic abuse was the second most common reason given for losing a home (14.5% of cases).<sup>56</sup> The homeless charity Crisis estimates that almost one in five of homeless women (18%) are homeless due to domestic abuse.<sup>57</sup> Domestic abuse accounts for at least one in ten people who require local authority support for homelessness in England, Wales and Scotland.<sup>58</sup> Actual need may be higher; the survey showed that one in three respondents left their home because of the abuse or leaving a relationship.

## Finances

A recent survey of female survivors of domestic abuse found that one in three respondents said their access to money during the relationship was controlled by the perpetrator.<sup>59</sup> One in four respondents said that their partner did not let them have money for essentials during the relationship. A similar number reported that they used savings or children's money for essentials. Many (43.1%) reported being in debt because of the abuse, and over a quarter regularly lost sleep through worrying about debt.

The consequences of domestic abuse can increase the risk of poverty. One study found that women in poverty were more likely to have faced extensive violence and abuse (14%), compared to women not in poverty (6%).<sup>60</sup>

## Employment

Over half (56.1%) of respondents on the same survey who had left an abusive relationship felt that the abuse had impacted their ability to work. Just under half of all respondents felt the abuse had negatively impacted their long-term employment prospects/earnings.

## Children and young people



In the words of UNICEF, some of the biggest victims of domestic abuse are the smallest.

In the words of UNICEF, some of the biggest victims of domestic abuse are the smallest.<sup>61</sup> Domestic abuse has a negative impact on the mental, emotional and psychological health of children. Children can suffer social and educational developmental problems, and in some cases grow to accept abuse as normal behaviour. An estimated one in five children are exposed to domestic abuse in the UK,<sup>62</sup> with 130,000 children living in homes where there is a high risk of serious harm or murder due to domestic abuse.<sup>63</sup>

In Buckinghamshire, for the financial year 2020 to 2021, there were over 2,400 referrals for a social care assessment to children's social care where domestic violence was the primary concern. This represents a 31% increase on the previous year. This accounts for 23% of all children's social care referrals. Almost 700 children and young people where domestic violence was a concern were given children in need plans, child protection plans or became looked- after. Children starting a social care service from 2020 to 2021 – where domestic violence was the primary concern – accounted for 23% of all children's social care services received. 105 children who had domestic abuse mentioned as a factor in their assessment became looked after by the local authority from 2020 to 2021. This represents half of all children who became looked after in that year. These figures will underestimate domestic abuse suffered and witnessed by children in Buckinghamshire as not all cases will be referred to social care. Of the 116 children accommodated in Women's Aid Buckinghamshire refuges from 2019 to 2020, over half (66%) had directly witnessed domestic abuse, and 17 of the families were subject to a Child Protection Plan.

The full extent of harm will differ for each child depending on their circumstances and age. Around two in three (62%) children living with domestic abuse are thought to be directly harmed by the perpetrator; harm is also caused by witnessing abuse.<sup>64</sup> Wider effects such as having to move home and school to escape abuse can further harm children by increasing instability in their lives. A survey of women in English refuges showed that about two in three residents had children with them.<sup>65</sup>

## Growing up with domestic abuse is likely to be a traumatic and stressful negative experience.

Growing up with domestic abuse is likely to be a traumatic and stressful negative experience, and the impacts will vary between children. Children may demonstrate outward behaviours such as aggression, anti-social behaviour and risk taking;<sup>66</sup> others may have difficulty expressing their emotions. Children may also feel depressed, anxious, angry, guilty, confused, and helpless.<sup>67</sup>

The impacts can be long term. Studies suggest that exposure to domestic abuse in early life may increase the risk of:

- Alcohol use. Children witnessing violence are more likely to misuse alcohol later in life.<sup>68</sup>
- Becoming a victim or perpetrator of domestic abuse, although this association is complex.<sup>69,70</sup> For example, normalising experiences of abuse will make it difficult for children to establish and maintain healthy relationships, and may increase their risk of domestic abuse in the future.
- Antisocial and risk-taking behaviour, early pregnancy and homelessness. Experiencing any or a combination of these in adolescence increases vulnerability to sexual exploitation and criminal behaviour.<sup>71</sup>

“Feeling safe is even more important when you have your children to think about.”

- Victim of domestic abuse, Buckinghamshire

### Wider society

A Home Office report estimated the annual economic and social costs of domestic abuse, including domestic homicides, to be over £66 billion in England and Wales (year ending March 2017).<sup>72</sup> The largest costs as a consequence of domestic abuse were the physical and emotional harms (£47,287 million). The largest costs in response to domestic abuse were police costs (£1,257 million). The average total cost per victim was an estimated £34,010, made up of lower-costing crimes such as indecent exposure, to the highest-cost crime of domestic homicide.



Using Home Office costs with our local estimate of 21,000 victims, we estimate that the potential annual cost of the consequences of domestic abuse in Buckinghamshire is £687 million.

Using Home Office costs with our local estimate of 21,000 victims, we estimate that the potential annual cost of the consequences of domestic abuse in Buckinghamshire is £687 million. This is physical and emotional harm costs of £510 million, lost output costs of £152 million (time off work and reduced productivity), and health service costs of £25 million.

Using Home Office costs with our local estimate of about 4,000 victims known to the police in 2020 to 2021, we estimate that the potential annual cost of responding to domestic abuse in Buckinghamshire only for those we know about is £3.5 million, of which police costs account for £2.5 million. However, the health impact and costs would still accrue whether the victim reported the crime or not, so the local health costs will be an underestimate.

## Deaths from domestic abuse: domestic homicide reviews

A domestic homicide review must be carried out by local authorities in England and Wales following the death of an individual aged 16 or over, which has, or appears to have resulted from violence, abuse or neglect, and inflicted by someone personally connected to the victim.<sup>e</sup>

Each review provides a detailed account of events leading up to the homicide, the context, and what we can learn from the event. The most recent data from the Home Office (December 2016) show that over 400 reviews have been completed since domestic homicide reviews started in 2011.<sup>73</sup> As of July 2020, 39 domestic homicides have taken place in the Thames Valley region, and 15 in Buckinghamshire.



As of July 2020, 39 domestic homicides have taken place in the Thames Valley region, and 15 in Buckinghamshire.

### What can we learn from these deaths?

Published homicide data for England and Wales (from the Home Office report and another recent report), show that no two cases are the same.<sup>74</sup> However, there are certain key themes which have been identified. Data for England and Wales are used given the limited data available for local cases.

- Women are more likely to be victims than men. About eight in ten victims are female.
- Men are more likely to be perpetrators than women. About nine in ten perpetrators are male.
- Data on ethnicity of victims is often missing.
- Substance misuse can be a prominent feature in the lives of both victims and perpetrators.

<sup>e</sup> Perpetrator and victim related, or are/were in intimate partner relationship, or member of the same household.



- Victims and perpetrators are commonly known to services prior to the homicide. For example, just under half of cases were known to the police to be in an abusive relationship.
- Perpetrators of homicides follow a pattern of behaviour, including having previous controlling behaviour, and reacting violently to loss of control of the victim or relationship.<sup>75</sup>

Given that domestic homicide reviews aim to identify learning, service improvements and better prevention of domestic abuse and homicide, an anonymised and accessible national database of reports would help local authorities learn from other areas to help prevent these tragedies from happening.<sup>76</sup>

## Warning signs for intimate partner homicides

Between 2009 and 2018, a woman was killed every four days by her partner or ex-partner in the UK.<sup>77</sup>

Most victims of intimate partner homicides are women. A review of 372 intimate partner homicides of female victims, and patterns of behaviour in national domestic homicide review information identified **eight stages** that may predict homicide.<sup>78</sup> Controlling behaviour by the perpetrator was the best predictor of homicide, rather than a history of violence. This review has led to learning about how these homicides can be predicted, and therefore prevented.

All perpetrators who reached the last stage and committed homicide moved through each of the eight stages. However, many cases saw progression to stage five or six, followed by either regaining control and returning to stage three, or moving to another relationship.

1. **Pre-relationship history.** In almost all cases the perpetrator has a history of coercive control, stalking or domestic abuse.
2. **Early relationship.** The relationship moves at speed, such as moving in together and declaring love early on.
3. **Relationship.** There are controlling patterns in every case study, such as limiting the victim's movements, what she wears, or who she sees. The relationship may be dominated by coercive control, stalking, or domestic abuse. This stage ranged from 3 weeks to 50 years in the case studies.
4. **Trigger/s.** Risk rises due to possible loss of control by the perpetrator over the victim or the relationship. Usually this loss of control comes from separation initiated by the victim.
5. **Escalation.** The perpetrator tries to gain back control back. More frequent and severe controlling behaviours are seen, such as crying, violence, stalking, or suicide/murder threats.
6. **Change in thinking.** With the loss of control comes a decision by the perpetrator about how they deal with this loss. This may be to form a new relationship, to mend the current relationship, or to decide to kill someone.
7. **Planning.** The perpetrator plans the homicide. This could include buying weapons, digging a grave, researching methods online, planning and organising finances, or stalking to gather intelligence.
8. **Homicide.** Case studies included violent homicides where the level of violence used appears to have no direct relation to that within the relationship.

Over 125 domestic abuse organisations and professionals have been calling for a national response to perpetrators for some time, including a national perpetrator strategy. A positive step towards this came in the HM Treasury Budget 2021, which included funding across England and Wales for perpetrator behaviour change programmes that work with offenders to reduce the risk of abuse occurring.<sup>79</sup>

## To start with it was the occasional push or slap, but it got worse

"I met my ex-husband when I was 17. I moved in with his family six months later when I was pregnant. Everything went well for a while. However, one evening at the pub he suddenly told me we were going home – I thought it was a bit strange but agreed. On the way home he told me that he was angry with me as I was flirting with another man. I told him that I hadn't and he slapped me around the face. This was a bit of a shock but he apologised straight away and told me that he was sorry.

"Things went okay, we got married and my child was born. I quickly became pregnant again and although things did become a bit tense, I put this down to the pressures of suddenly having a family. My ex-husband would drink a bit. It seemed that if he had too much we would argue, he would say that I was lazy, and that I could not look after my children properly. The drinking was happening most evenings and so were the insults. Then it started to get physical.

"To start with it was the occasional push or slap, but it got worse. One particular evening, when the children were six and five, he came home from work early and shouted at me because the dinner was not ready when he had arrived. He told me that I was useless, slapped me across the face and then told me to get on with his dinner. When I took it through to him he started shouting at me – 'What the hell are you giving me, I don't like this..!' He grabbed the back of my neck, and pushed my face towards the food, shouting at me all the time, saying I was trying to poison him. Then he shoved his hand full of food in into my mouth and told me to eat it. He pushed me to the floor and started to punch and kick me.

"The children were screaming. He told me to shut them up or he would sort them out too. I managed to quieten them down by taking them upstairs. When I returned I apologised to him about the food and he told me to clear it up. He said that I was not fulfilling my duty as his wife properly. He then made me have sex with him and all the time he was telling me how useless I was and that I deserved everything I got.

"The next morning I decided that I could not do this anymore. I contacted my friend and she took me to her house. We spoke to housing and they gave me the number for Women's Aid, where there was space in a refuge for me and my children. I did not have much with me, just a few clothes and things for the children. When I got to the refuge I was shown to a room and was given some spare clothes and food. I did not have any money. My worker helped me to claim a crisis loan and sorted out getting my benefits. I did report what had happened to the police and my worker came with me to make a statement. The police were very helpful but unfortunately although they arrested him he denied everything. They were unable to proceed with any charges.

"When I was in the refuge I was helped with things like housing, and support for the children getting them in to school. I stayed in the refuge for six months and I was then offered a house from the Council. The staff at the refuge helped me to get things for the house and helped me move in. I contacted Women's Aid later as my ex-husband had applied for custody of the children. He was awarded contact only. I could not have coped without the help of Women's Aid and I am so grateful to them for helping me and the children. My ex-husband no longer sees the children as he moved out of the country."

- Anonymous resident, Buckinghamshire

## 8. WHAT WORKS TO PREVENT DOMESTIC ABUSE?

Domestic abuse is a complex societal issue spanning many areas of life. Prevention and the response must be multifaceted.

Domestic abuse is a complex societal issue spanning many areas of life. Prevention and the response must be multifaceted. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) has published guidance on multi-agency working for domestic violence and abuse (2014) which includes 17 recommendations.<sup>80</sup> These include a local strategic partnership to prevent domestic abuse; the scope, shape and variety of local services; the quality of partnership working; and staff knowledge and skills in identifying and supporting victims of domestic abuse.

Embedding early intervention and prevention into a multiagency response to domestic abuse is highlighted in the government's Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy (2016 to 2020).<sup>81</sup> The response includes government-led initiatives as well as local authority multi-agency working, safeguarding, and commissioning. It highlights the multi-layered and co-ordinated health, social and criminal justice approaches required to tackle this issue and can be applied to all victims rather than only women and girls.

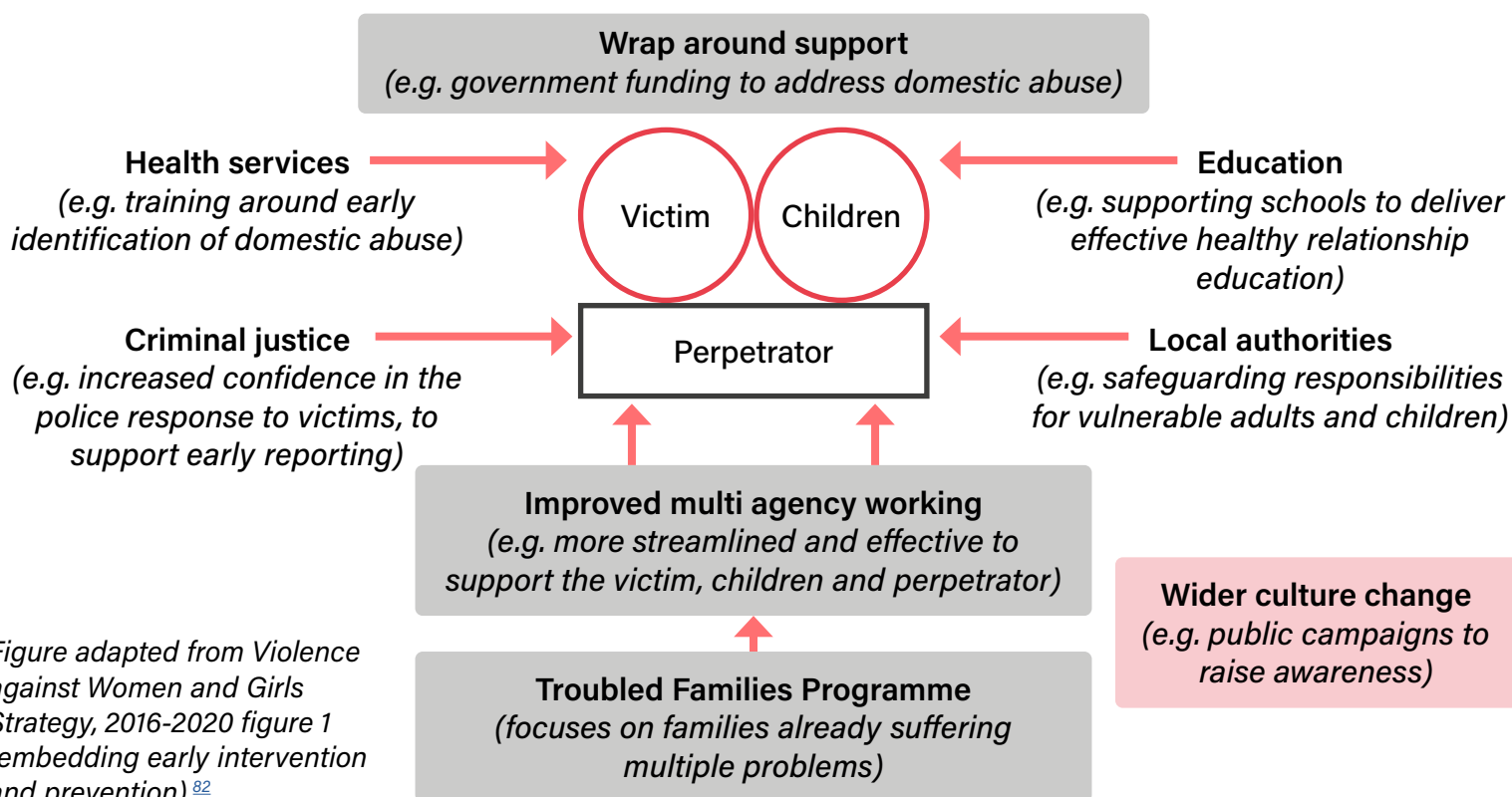


Figure adapted from Violence against Women and Girls Strategy, 2016-2020 figure 1 (embedding early intervention and prevention).<sup>82</sup>

New and existing programmes should be monitored and reviewed to improve the robustness of evidence.

Historically, many interventions addressing domestic abuse have not been thoroughly evaluated so it is vital that new and existing programmes should be monitored and reviewed to improve the robustness of the evidence. Some evidence based or potentially effective domestic abuse interventions are highlighted below.

- **School-based awareness raising of domestic abuse** is known to achieve positive changes in knowledge and attitudes towards domestic abuse and prevent dating violence.
- **Campaigns to raise awareness of domestic abuse** is a fundamental step in victims and bystanders recognising domestic abuse. This should be combined with signposting the public and professionals to services.



'Bystander interventions' challenge harmful attitudes, language and behaviour relating to domestic abuse.

- **'Bystander interventions'** challenge harmful attitudes, language and behaviour relating to domestic abuse.<sup>83</sup> These interventions – from challenging a disrespectful statement to noticing signs of domestic abuse and offering support – can be undertaken by anyone. Solace Women's Aid provides training and materials via their website for everyone,<sup>84</sup> as well as information specifically for men.<sup>85</sup>
- **Offering safe opportunities to seek help** such as campaigns using code words that victims can use in specific circumstances to alert someone to abuse. As services have moved online, and in-person interactions are replaced with a digital offer, a hand signal or gesture may be preferred to a code word. Examples include the recent 'Ask for ANI', 'Ask for Angela', and the Zoom signal campaigns.<sup>86</sup>

- **Advocacy** interventions with victims are based on empowerment, discussing solutions, and setting goals to respond to their situation. These interventions usually link survivors with legal, police, housing and financial services, and many also include psychological or psycho-educational support. NICE recommends that all domestic abuse victims should be provided with advocacy and advice services tailored to their level of risk and specific need.<sup>87</sup> Evidence suggests that intensive advocacy may improve quality of life and reduce physical abuse for one to two years.<sup>88</sup>
- **Training of health care professionals** in domestic abuse education and advocacy may lead to an increase in awareness, and greater disclosure, identification and referral to domestic abuse services.<sup>89</sup> For example, data from domestic homicide reviews show us that a victim's contact with services may be limited to their GP so it is vital that GPs are skilled and proactive in recognising signs of domestic abuse and referring patients for urgent help.

The 'Identification and Referral to Improve Safety' (IRIS) training and support programme is an example of an effective health care training intervention, designed for GP surgeries.<sup>90</sup> Evaluation of IRIS showed improved identification of women experiencing domestic abuse and improved referral rates to specialist services (compared to surgeries not trained in IRIS).<sup>91</sup> A recent evaluation across GP surgeries in London showed that of the 144 surgeries trained in IRIS, a 30-fold increase in domestic abuse referrals was seen compared to the those surgeries without IRIS training.<sup>92</sup> These outcomes show that clinician behaviour can be changed in relation to domestic abuse enquiry and referral, for the benefit of the victim. A cost-effectiveness study showed the IRIS programme to have lower costs and greater effectiveness for GP surgeries, compared to surgeries offering usual care (not using IRIS).<sup>93</sup>

- **Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVA)** are trained to address the safety of victims at high risk of harm from intimate partners, ex-partners or family members. There is evidence suggesting that IDVAs have a positive impact on the safety and well-being of victims experiencing extremely serious levels of domestic abuse.<sup>94</sup> This reduced risk of harm has some effect on reducing the risk of domestic abuse to children.
- **Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs)** are regular multiagency meetings to discuss high risk domestic abuse cases. A coordinated safety plan is enacted to support the victim. The victim is ideally represented by an IDVA. Research indicates that MARACs (and IDVAs) can improve victim safety and reduce revictimization, and therefore may be a highly cost-effective measure.<sup>95</sup>

## Perpetrator interventions

Interventions aimed at perpetrators can be either criminal sanctions, or perpetrator interventions and programmes. Only 1% of perpetrators receive any specialist intervention to challenge or change their behaviour.

NICE guidance states that *'There is lack of consistent evidence of the effectiveness of programmes for people who perpetrate domestic violence and abuse.'* However, *'such interventions are an important part of domestic violence and abuse services, and provided they are supported by robust evaluation to inform future commissioning decisions, should be recommended.'*<sup>96</sup>

NICE has also published quality standards for domestic violence and abuse (2016).<sup>97</sup> The standards are (1) asking about domestic abuse, (2) responding to domestic abuse, (3) referring to specialist services for victims, and (4) referring to specialist services for perpetrators.

## 9. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report shows that domestic violence and abuse is common, but often hidden and underreported. The impacts for victims, survivors, their families, and society are serious and wide-reaching. In preparing this report, we have reviewed the latest data, evidence and looked at current service provision.

Preventing domestic abuse from occurring must be a priority and we are supporting our schools to implement recent RSHE (relationships, sex and health education) that includes recognising domestic abuse and abusive relationships, coercive control, consent, and mutual respect in friendships and relationships. Looking ahead, the new multi-agency Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board will be championing good practice in awareness raising, education and training and the provision of high-quality support and advocacy services. Services for victims (including children) and perpetrators will be further developed to meet the needs of diverse groups and people with protected characteristics, recognising that anyone can be a victim. Starting with partners on the Board, all organisations will be encouraged to adopt measures to keep employees and service users safe from domestic abuse including during home working, remote digital working, and consultations. The Board will also explore how we can share and learn from past and current domestic homicide reviews to understand how such tragedies can be prevented in the future.

**The following recommendations should, in addition to statutory duties for support for people living in safe accommodation, inform the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board strategy and delivery plan:**

- 1** The Domestic Abuse Board should support awareness raising of domestic abuse through coordinated, county-wide participation in a selected national campaign.
- 2** The Domestic Abuse Board should consider how bystander training could be utilised locally and promoted, as an evidence-based intervention to challenge harmful attitudes, language and behaviour relating to domestic abuse for people of all ages.
- 3** Buckinghamshire Council Community Safety team should consider how to increase the diversity within the domestic violence and abuse champions scheme by actively recruiting network members that reflect the diversity of people that may experience domestic abuse.
- 4** The Domestic Abuse Board should develop and roll-out high-quality, shared, scenario-based training across Buckinghamshire for key stakeholders and front-line staff. Primary care should also consider implementing the IRIS training package as an effective evidence-based training programme across Buckinghamshire.
- 5** The Domestic Abuse Board should oversee the development of a Buckinghamshire domestic abuse referral pathway for all staff to follow, to ensure timely and responsive delivery of services, fully understood by frontline staff and accessible to victims seeking help.
- 6** All Board member agencies to support the development of an evidence base for what works for perpetrators, to inform commissioning of promising interventions, and evaluation of their effectiveness.

## 10. GLOSSARY

**Adverse Childhood experience (ACE):** ACEs are stressful events occurring during childhood that directly affect a child or affect the environment in which they live (e.g. growing up in a house where there is domestic violence). ACEs can have long-term negative impacts on health and well-being.

**Child protection plan:** A plan drawn up by the local authority to set out how a child can be kept safe, how things can be made better for the family and what support they will need.

**Honour based violence:** A crime or incident which has or may have been committed to protect or defend the honour of the family and/or community.

**Independent domestic violence advisor (IDVA):** IDVAs support victims to reduce immediate risk and increase self-esteem and resilience. The aim of the service is for victims to effect change and keep themselves safe in the longer term.

**LGBT+:** People who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or have another definition of their gender and sexuality.

**Multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC):** A multiagency panel producing a coordinated action plan to increase the victim/s safety and manage the perpetrator/s behaviour.

**Protected characteristics:** It is against the law to discriminate against someone because of the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation. The Equality Act of 2010 protects citizens against discrimination.

**Stalking:** This can be a form of domestic abuse. It is a pattern of persistent and unwanted attention, and is often committed by ex-partners but can be committed by anyone.

# 11. APPENDICES

## I. Domestic abuse full definition

Full government definition of domestic violence and abuse:

- Behaviour of a person towards another person is domestic abuse if (a) the people are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and (b) the behaviour is abusive.
- Behaviour is abusive if it consists of any of the following:
  - a. physical or sexual abuse
  - b. violent or threatening behaviour
  - c. controlling or coercive behaviour
  - d. economic abuse
  - e. psychological, emotional or other abuse

The definition covers different types of relationships including family members, ex-partners and those who are not cohabiting. Although the definition refers to people aged 16 or over, children can still be victims. If the abuser directs his/her behaviour at a child to be abusive to another adult, this is domestic abuse.

Controlling behaviour is defined 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 defined as *“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”*. This can also include stalking, which is a pattern of persistent and unwanted attention.<sup>103</sup>

Economic abuse is wider than financial abuse, as described by the charity Surviving Economic Abuse: *“Economic abuse is designed to reinforce or create economic instability. In this way it limits women’s choices and ability to access safety. Lack of access to economic resources can result in women staying with abusive men for longer and experiencing more harm as a result.”*<sup>104</sup>

Psychological, emotional or other abuse can include controlling another person using emotional or manipulative methods such as shaming, criticizing and embarrassing. A consistent pattern of emotional abuse will have a negative effect on a victim’s self-esteem and mental health.

## II. Domestic Abuse Bill

The Domestic Abuse Bill 2021 was passed in April 2021.<sup>105</sup> It will:

- Widen the definition of domestic abuse to include other abusive behaviour as well as violent or sexual offences
- Improve the justice system to provide protection for victims, for example limiting or prohibiting cross-examination of victims



- Strengthen the support for victims of abuse by statutory agencies
- Appoint Domestic Abuse Commissioner (Nicole Jacobs was appointed in September 2019)

The Domestic Abuse Bill 2021 includes a number of statutory and non-statutory intentions that affect local authorities, some of which are summarised here:

***Local authorities in England to provide support\* to victims of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and other safe accommodation.***

- Local authorities in England to establish a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board. The Board will:
  - Assess the need for accommodation-based domestic abuse services for all victims
  - Develop and publish a strategy for this provision, and use for commissioning decisions
  - Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy, and report back to central government
  - Include wide representation (local authority, voices of victims and their children, domestic abuse charities, health care providers and police and other criminal justice agencies)

\* Support includes advocacy support, domestic abuse prevention advice, specialist support for victims with protected characteristics and/or complex needs, children's support, housing-related support, and counselling and therapy for adults and children.

***All eligible homeless victims of domestic abuse automatically have 'priority need' for homelessness assistance.***

- Currently, domestic abuse victims without a priority need (such as being pregnant) must show that they are vulnerable as a result of fleeing domestic abuse in order to access homelessness assistance. The Bill removes the need to prove this vulnerability.

***When rehousing an existing lifetime secure tenant, local authorities must honour this by granting a new lifetime secure tenancy in the case that the tenant or household member has been a victim of domestic abuse and is being rehoused as a result.***

***Introduce regulations and statutory guidance on Relationship Education, Relationship and Sex Education, and Health Education.***

***Invest in domestic abuse training for responding agencies and professionals.***