



Comprehensive Spending Review 2007  
**Refuge's Submission to the Children and Young People's Review**

September 2006

## **Refuge**

Founded in 1971, Refuge has grown from a small charity, pioneering the world's first refuge, to be the country's largest single provider of specialist accommodation and support for women and children escaping domestic violence. On any given day, we support over 900 women and children in our refuges and through our community based outreach services.

Refuge runs award winning media and advertising campaigns to raise public awareness of domestic violence nationally and internationally, whilst also campaigning and lobbying for better provision for women and children experiencing domestic violence.

## **Introduction**

'Support for Parents: the Best Start for Children' identified steps to improve outcomes for children and young people. The report acknowledged that there is more to poverty than income alone and that children's well-being is also determined by their experiences, particularly in the early years.

Yet although the report recognised the negative impact that domestic violence can have on parents\* it did not recognise the key relationship between children's experience of domestic violence and the five outcomes for all children.†

This is surprising since the report goes on to recognise that children's experiences are not only a product of their community and access to public services, but also of their parents' behaviour, parenting styles and choices.

Refuge believes that the Comprehensive Spending Review provides an excellent opportunity to develop the analysis set out in the report. By demonstrating how domestic violence is a driver of poor outcomes for children, the following submission shows how violence is a significant element within the 'parenting and parents' behaviour' factor identified within the terms of reference for the Children and Young People's Review.

## **What is domestic violence?**

In 2004, the government agreed a 'standard' definition of domestic violence as follows:

'Any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality'

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\* As an exacerbating feature of loneliness and isolation (p.11) and as a personal difficulty when balancing the needs of children with the need for respite and time for themselves (p.23)

† Outlined in 'Every Child Matters'

The government has made it clear that this definition incorporates issues such as forced marriage, female genital cutting and co-called 'honour killings', as well as elder abuse when committed within the family or by an intimate partner.<sup>1</sup>

Whilst violence involving individuals under the age of 18 is classified as child abuse, a number of agencies are using a wider definition for their own purposes. Some parts of the Metropolitan Police,<sup>‡</sup> for instance, have altered the definition to include individuals aged between 16 and 18 years. This is due to the increasing number of young women that are approaching them about domestic violence.<sup>§</sup>

Domestic violence occurs across society, irrespective of age, race, culture, nationality, religion, sexuality, disability, age, class and educational level. This means that it is not restricted to specific identifiable groups within the population. However, what is known is that:

- 89 per cent of domestic violence victims who suffer 4 or more attacks are women.<sup>2</sup>
- 1 woman in 4 (25 per cent) is physically abused by a partner during her life-time.<sup>3</sup>
- Domestic violence is widespread: an incident of domestic violence occurs in the UK every 6 to 20 seconds.<sup>4</sup>
- Domestic violence costs the lives of more than two women every week.<sup>5</sup>
- Women with no prior history of substance use and who experience domestic violence are 15 times more likely to abuse alcohol, 6 times more likely to abuse drugs and 8 times more likely to attempt suicide than women with no experience of domestic violence.<sup>6</sup>

### **How does domestic violence impact children?**

Exposure to domestic violence at home poses one of the most serious risks to children in our society.<sup>7</sup> Research demonstrates that children abused by domestic violence can be negatively affected in every aspect of their development – from their health and safety, to their school attendance and achievement, economic well-being and emotional development.<sup>8</sup>

Where domestic violence is accompanied by parental mental ill-health or drug or alcohol abuse then this too will impact the child. Domestic violence may also reduce the ability of the non-abusing parent to parent effectively and may impair the parent/child relationship.<sup>9</sup>

- It is estimated that anywhere between 240,000 and 963,000 children are exposed to domestic violence in the UK.<sup>10</sup>
- According to the British Crime Survey in 1996, half of those who suffered domestic violence in the previous year were living with children aged 16 years or under.<sup>11</sup>
- 90 per cent of children who live in a family where domestic violence takes place are in the same or next room when violence occurs.<sup>12</sup>
- Men who are violent to their female partners are often violent towards their children. The overlap between men's violence towards women and the physical abuse of children is estimated to be in the range of 30-66 per cent.<sup>13</sup>
- A third of domestic violence starts or escalates during pregnancy.<sup>14</sup>
- Domestic violence is associated with a raised incidence of miscarriage, low birth weight, premature births, foetal injury and foetal death.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>‡</sup> Brent Borough and Tower Hamlets

<sup>§</sup> NSPCC (2006) 'Case Notes' – girls aged 16-18 report an alarming trend of abuse from their boyfriends

Children react in different ways to domestic violence depending on their context and environment (for example, the level of violence they are exposed to, their age and ethnicity, the strength of their support systems and their own personality and coping strategies). However, the varying needs of children and young people are at risk of being overlooked due to the secrecy, fear and shame typically associated with this issue.

**What should be the role of universal services in providing access to protective and preventative support, risk assessment and referral?**

Due to the cross cutting nature of domestic violence, many statutory services have a role to play in promoting the safety of children affected by domestic violence and providing effective and early interventions. Yet, as things currently stand, universal service responses to children experiencing domestic violence are patchy and frequently fail to address their needs.<sup>16</sup>

In order to provide effective and supportive interventions to children experiencing domestic violence, Refuge believes that a clear, strategic, co-ordinated and fully funded approach to services needs to be adopted. Despite some encouraging developments in recent years, there remains an urgent need to identify gaps in services and to adopt an integrated way of working. Only when services offer certainty and effective responses to women and children suffering domestic abuse, will the violence be disclosed.

However, Refuge's experience shows that the vast majority of children who come to Refuge have not discussed the violence they have experienced with anyone before arriving in emergency accommodation. These children need:

- Help, support and advocacy to ensure that they are not left to cope with their experiences alone;
- Consistent messages that domestic violence is wrong;
- Information that domestic violence is not their fault; and
- Opportunities to share their experiences with other children so as to reduce their isolation.<sup>17</sup>

A number of key agencies, including Refuge, have set out a 'Vision for Services for Children and Young People Affected by Domestic Violence' (2006). This document recommends:

- Support for children affected by domestic violence to be incorporated into good practice;
- Training for all professionals within universal services about the impact of domestic violence on the five outcomes for all children;
- Policies, protocols and procedures in place to identify domestic violence and ensure the safety of children (including information-sharing, referrals and risk assessment);
- Monitoring systems and compliance mechanisms;
- Recognition of the specific and varying needs of children, teenagers and young adults;
- Child and parental involvement in the planning and reviewing of services to children affected by domestic violence; and
- Universal access to the full range of services available, including for those who have not traditionally accessed services (black and minority ethnic groups and those children with a disability).

A number of key opportunities exist to make the implementation of these recommendations a reality, not least the restructuring of children's services brought about by Every Child Matters. A number of health services have become far more active in domestic violence work over the past five years.<sup>18</sup> The Department of Health, for example, is providing effective leadership in this area and, in 2004, announced the introduction of routine enquiry for domestic violence in all health settings within an agreed framework.

There also exists a particularly important role for the education sector to play. Since children exposed to violence in schools often confide in their peers, teaching on domestic violence in schools not only equips children and young people with the skills needed for equal and respectful relationships, but also creates an effective support network for children affected by domestic violence.

However a number of challenges persist. Two-thirds of all refuge residents are children yet there is no statutory funding from Supporting People or other government bodies for counselling and psychological services to help and support children who are traumatised by witnessing and experiencing domestic violence. Refuges have to rely on voluntary income. In addition, social service resources are limited and targeted to high risk child protection cases. Community-based services would have the potential to reach many more children.

It is also important that services for children affected by domestic violence are developed alongside services for women. Increasing safety for children cannot be achieved without increasing the safety of the non-abusing parent so the needs of children exposed to domestic violence need to be fully integrated into the policy and practice of all key services used by abused women.

In many instances, there also remains a significant gap between policy rhetoric and reality on the ground. A recent survey found that, despite their agencies' policies, a number of health and social care workers were so confused about what to do if they did suspect domestic violence that they did not ask.<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, whilst 'Supporting Families' (1998) highlighted the role of Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) as a means to equip children with the 'knowledge, skills and attitudes to become confident, caring and responsible citizens' and recognised its role in 'sending messages that domestic violence is unacceptable', the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's describes provision for PSHE as 'patchy'. Indeed, the delivery of the PSHE framework (including teaching on domestic violence) continues not to be a statutory requirement for either primary or secondary schools.

Since domestic violence is fundamentally linked to, and in some cases is the cause of, a wide range of other social problems,\*\* effective action by all service agencies would result in positive outcomes not only for women and children but to the rest of society.

### **How can targeted and specialist services intervene earlier to address problems before they become acute?**

Implementation of the recommendations above would enable professionals to identify children whose needs are complex at an earlier opportunity. They would then be able to refer to children

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\*\* To name but a few: animal abuse, anti-social behaviour, bullying, child abuse, fear of crime, low public confidence in the CJS, mental health problems, poverty, self-harm, social exclusion, substance abuse, suicide, teenage pregnancy, truancy and women's offending

to the next 'tier' of support where they would have access to additional services before their problems became more acute.

However, although the shift in emphasis towards early intervention is critically important and the introduction of practices such as routine enquiry will undoubtedly identify more abused women, it will be vital to create follow-up services and obtain the necessary funding needed to increase the capacity of local support services.<sup>20</sup> Floating support is particularly important in this respect, providing women and children with community based care.

More specialised services for children should be built on existing provision. They should recognise the unique contribution and experience of voluntary sector domestic violence services and facilitate their involvement in planning and delivering services. The involvement of the voluntary sector is particularly important since it is within this sector that domestic violence expertise primarily resides. In addition, independence from statutory agencies is often a crucial factor for women and children seeking assistance.

### **How can the impact of intervention to protect children, young people and families with complex needs repeatedly moving in and out of targeted services be sustained?**

A 'Vision for Services for Children and Young People Affected by Domestic Violence' (2006) sets out a tiered model that provides a conceptual framework for matching the level of a child's need to the complexity of the interventions required to meet that need.

It assumes as a starting point that the needs of most children can be met within universal services (those available to and accessed by all children) with the introduction of additional services and more complex multi-agency responses at each progressive level of need and risk. The aim is to support the child wherever possible within the universal setting and to enable the child to return to universal services following a period of more intensive or specialist support and so avoid social exclusion.

Services set up according to this model would enable children to move up and down the tiers successfully. This means that the role of lead professionals to guide and assist children through the tiers is crucial. So too is good quality assessment of risk and levels of need.

### **How can rights and responsibilities for individuals, families and communities be integrated into services to improve the lives of children and young people?**

Children have the right to protection from all forms of violence under Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is therefore the responsibility of the state (and not the abused woman) to reduce and prevent domestic violence.

One of the key challenges for government in relation to domestic violence is overcoming the perspective that 'domestic' means 'private'. This means that government needs to send out consistent messages that domestic violence is a human rights issue and is wrong, both legally and morally.

A two pronged approach is required. Firstly, government needs to make it clear that domestic violence is a crime. This includes holding individual abusers to account for their behaviour in such a way that reduces risk and acts as a future deterrent for them and potential abusers.

Secondly, government needs to challenge social tolerance/approval of domestic violence by raising awareness of the issue and dispelling the myths surrounding it. Education should play a pivotal role, working towards changing the attitudes and beliefs which underpin and maintain violence against women and children.

Increasing public support for survivors is also vital since, in the first instance, victims are more likely to disclose the abuse to family members, friends, neighbourhoods and employers than to service providers. Increasing the general public's knowledge and understanding will therefore enhance the ability of these people to offer safe and appropriate support to victims of domestic violence.

**What would be the impact of more preventative services and early intervention on the life chances of children and young people and on the value for money of public spending on children, young people and families?**

Domestic violence is costly, both in human and financial terms. As stated in the introduction above, exposure to domestic violence can negatively affect every aspect of a child's development.

Agencies spend an enormous amount of their resources on addressing the negative outcomes of domestic violence, but are often unaware that they are doing so. As a consequence, it is underestimated how substantial domestic violence work actually is.

National research into the cost of domestic violence<sup>21</sup> reveals that the cost of domestic violence to services (criminal justice system, health, social services, housing, civil legal) amounts to **£3.1 billion** alone. Including the cost of domestic violence to the state, employers and victims, the total cost of domestic violence is estimated at around **£23 billion**.

**Criminal Justice System:** Despite chronic under-reporting, domestic violence is a high volume crime representing 25 per cent of all reported violent crime. The cost of domestic violence is around £1 billion a year. The largest single component is that of the police. Other components include: prosecution, courts, probation, prison and legal aid.

**Health Care:** The cost to the NHS for physical injuries is around £1.2 billion a year. This includes GPs and hospitals. There is also an element of mental health care, estimated at an additional £176 million.

**Social Services:** The annual cost to social services is nearly a quarter of a billion pounds. This is overwhelmingly for children rather than adults, especially those caught up in the co-occurrence for domestic violence and child abuse.

**Housing:** Expenditure on emergency housing and refuges amounts to £0.16 billion a year.

**Civil Legal:** Civil legal services cost over £0.3 billion, about half of which is borne by legal aid and half by the individual. This includes both specialist legal actions such as injunctions to restrain or expel a violent partner as well as actions around divorce and child custody.

**Economic Output:** Lost economic output accounts for around £2.7 billion a year. This is the cost of time off work due to injuries. It is estimated that around half of the costs of such sickness is borne by the employer and half by the individual in lost wages.

**Human and Emotional:** Domestic violence leads to pain and suffering that is not counted in the cost of services. This amounts to over £17 billion a year.

Increased investment in prevention and early intervention would help offset more costly interventions at a later stage, whilst the savings in human terms would be priceless.

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- 1 Greater London Authority (2005) 'The Second London Domestic Violence Strategy', November
  - 2 Home Office (2005) 'Specialist Domestic Violence Court Programme Guidance' October
  - 3 Mooney (1994)
  - 4 Professor Betsy Stanko (2000)
  - 5 Homicide Statistics (1998)
  - 6 Stark and Flitcrafy (1996); BMA (1998)
  - 7 Greater London Authority (2005) 'The Second London Domestic Violence Strategy', November
  - 8 Jaffe, P (1999) 'Children of Battered Women'
  - 9 LGA (2006) 'Vision for Children and Young People affected by Domestic Violence'
  - 10 UNICEF and The Body Shop (2006) 'Behind Closed Doors: The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children'
  - 11 Mirrlees-Black, C (1999) 'Domestic Violence: Findings from a new British Crime Survey self-completion questionnaire'
  - 12 Hughes (1992) cited in LGA (2006) 'Vision for Children and Young People affected by Domestic Violence'
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  - 14 National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services
  - 15 McWilliams and McKeirnan (1993) cited in LGA (2006) 'Vision for Children and Young People affected by Domestic Violence'
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  - 17 Greater London Authority (2005) 'The Second London Domestic Violence Strategy', November
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  - 19 Nicolson, P (2006) 'Domestic Abuse: Women Seeking Help'
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  - 21 Walby, S (2004) 'The Cost of Domestic Violence'