

Women's Aid Annual Survey 2014

women's aid
until women & children are safe

Foreword

Polly Neate, Chief Executive, Women's Aid



“The Women's Aid Annual Survey paints a clear picture of the very real challenges women and their children escaping violence have to get help as services are being cut and support restricted. It also clearly shows the availability of domestic violence services across England, what they provide, and – crucially – the challenges they face. Women's Aid is extremely grateful to all those services that responded to the Annual Survey, particularly at a time when they are under unprecedented pressure.

This year's Annual Survey sadly demonstrates the real crisis that our domestic violence services in England are in. Not only reduced resources but also, crucially, poor decisions about how those resources are spent are directly impacting the women and children for whom these services are literally a lifeline.

With nearly a third of referrals being turned away because of lack of space, this year's survey shows the ever present demand for domestic violence services that support women and children. Yet, despite pressures that are seeing 37% of respondents having to maintain a service with no dedicated funding, and 13% having closed a service due to lack of funding, thousands of women and children are being supported to escape, cope and rebuild their lives after domestic violence.

Cutbacks in other areas are also directly impacting domestic violence services, as can be seen in the number struggling to find school places, social work support or mental health services for the children and young people they support.

I hope this year's Annual Survey serves as a reminder, in Women's Aid 40th year, of the vital, life-saving and life-changing work that domestic violence services deliver for the women and children who need them. I hope it is also a stark indication of the crisis that is facing many domestic violence services across the country and the absolute need for a new model of sustainable funding for them.”

Executive Summary

Women's Aid is the national charity for women and children working to end domestic abuse. We empower survivors by keeping their voices at the heart of our work, listening and responding to their needs. We are a federation of 250 organisations who provide lifesaving services to women and children across the country. We provide expert training, qualifications and consultancy to a range of agencies and professionals working with survivors or commissioning domestic abuse services, and award a National Quality Mark for services which meet our quality standards. Our campaigns achieve change in policy, practice and awareness, encouraging healthy relationships and helping to build a future where domestic abuse is no longer tolerated. The 24 Hour National Domestic Violence Helpline on 0808 2000 247 (run in partnership with Refuge) and our range of online services, which include the Survivors' Forum, help hundreds of thousands of women and children every year.

The Women's Aid Annual Survey of domestic violence services across England is the largest collection of such data in the country. The information it provides about domestic violence services, the thousands of women and children they support and the challenges they face every year is invaluable for those commissioning domestic violence services, the violence against women and girls sector, Ministers and other decision makers.

Women's Aid Annual Survey 2014 once again paints a concerning picture of continued demand for domestic violence services, with increased pressure on services due to funding cuts and commissioning processes. It also shows the commitment and dedication of those that work in domestic violence services across the country as they continue to run services, sometimes without any dedicated funding, so women and children can access the much-needed support and protection they offer.

This year's survey also shows the specific challenges faced by children and young people's domestic violence services as they have difficulties in placing children in school and accessing specialist mental health support for them. With services also having to close or run services without dedicated funding it also shouldn't be a surprise that this year's survey found over 100 women and 84 children turned away from refuge on just one day in 2014.

The data here is vital to inform commissioning decisions. For example, the fact that 74% of women in refuge came from outside the local area clearly demonstrates the need for a national network, and the dangers when local authorities – as is increasingly the case – restrict refuge services to women from their own area.

Women's Aid Annual Survey 2014 Key Findings

Over the past financial year (2103/14):

- Nearly a third (31%) of referrals to refuge in 2013/14 were turned away because of lack of space (data provided by 115 services).
- 37% of respondents were running services without dedicated funding (data provided by 132 services). Of these respondents (49), 65% were running services on reserves (32), and 24% were running services on a voluntary basis (12).
- 13% of respondents had suspended/closed an area of service due to lack of funding (data provided by 132 services).
- 42% of responding specialist children and young people's services reported having difficulties in placing children living in refuge in schools, and 44% of responding services reported encountering problems in accessing mental health services for children and young people (data provided by 90 services).
- 74% of women accommodated came from a different local authority area to the refuge (4,177 women, data provided by 110 services).
- We received responses from 110 refuge services about the number of women and children supported in refuge accommodation. These services supported 6,163 women and 6,665 children in 2013/14.
- We received responses from 109 services about the number of women and children supported in non-refuge services in the community. These services supported 74,500 women and 13,701 children in 2013/14.

On just one day in 2014 in refuge services:

- 112 women and their 84 children were turned away from refuge because they could not be accommodated (data provided by 140 refuges).

In just one week in 2014 in outreach services:

- 369 women were turned away from outreach services in the community because of a lack of capacity (data provided by 87 services).

Methodology

Women's Aid sent out three online surveys to all domestic violence services in England in 2014. Services were also given the option to reply by email or post. These three surveys were

- A Year in the life of domestic violence services – information about domestic violence services in 2013/14.
- A year in the life of children and young people's services – information about children and young people domestic violence services in 2013/14.
- Refuge and outreach: a moment in time – information about refuge services in one day in 2014 and outreach services in one week in 2014.

Methodology: A year in the life of domestic violence services

This semi-structured survey was sent out to all domestic violence services in England, a total of 351 services. 157 services responded to the survey, giving a response rate of 45%.

Respondents were asked questions about the previous financial year in their service (1st April 2013-31st March 2014). Services responded online through SurveyMonkey, or by sending completed surveys by email or in the post.

Methodology: A year in the life of children and young people's services

This semi-structured survey was sent out to the 181 domestic violence services in England providing specialist children and young people's work. 107 of these services responded, giving a response rate of 59%.

Respondents were asked to answer questions about specialist children and young people's work during the previous financial year in their service, 1st April 2013-31st March 2014. Services responded online through SurveyMonkey, or by sending completed surveys by email or in the post.

Methodology: Refuge and outreach: a moment in time

This semi-structured, snap-shot survey was sent out to all domestic violence services in England, a total of 351 services. 171 services responded, giving a response rate of 49%.

Respondents were asked to answer questions about one day in refuge services (Thursday 26th June 2014) and one week in non-refuge services (Monday 23rd June – Friday 27th June

2014 inclusive), as applicable to that service. Services responded online through SurveyMonkey, or by sending completed surveys by email or in the post.

Some services who weren't able to respond to the Annual Survey gave reasons such as A limited capacity, staff changes or other priorities such as fundraising or completing tender documents.

A Year in the Life of Domestic Violence Services 2013/14:

Key Findings

In 2013/14 refuge and outreach services continued to see high demand and need for their services from women and children fleeing domestic violence, and continued to provide services for thousands of women and children who desperately needed them. These services provided a range of holistic, needs-led services which included refuge accommodation, helplines, outreach support, floating support, resettlement support, specialist children and young people services, Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVAs) and drop-in support.

- 6,163 women and 6,665 children were supported in refuge accommodation over the year by 110 services. The actual numbers of women and children supported in refuge accommodation in 2013/14 is likely to be much higher as this data is not from all domestic violence services in England.
- 74,500 women and 13,701 children and young people directly, and 54,208 children and young people indirectly were supported by 109 services in the year.

The survey also found that 74% of women who accessed refuge accommodation provided by survey respondents came from a different local authority area to the refuge. It is very concerning that some local authorities are restricting access to refuges they fund in order to prioritise places for local women. These restrictions are preventing women who need to flee as they can't access space and are not helpful for local women who may need to travel many, many miles from a dangerous perpetrator.

The most striking aspect of the findings of the survey was the picture it depicted of funding cuts, referrals declined and dedication to continuing to deliver services for women and children. The pressure that services are operating under mean that they are often trying to offer as much support as they can for as many women as they can without dedicated funding. Limited resources makes this very challenging. For example, 31% of total referrals to services (6,337 of 20,736) were declined because there were no vacancies and 102 services had to turn away 389 women with no recourse to public funds. It is clear that the demand for domestic violence services remains high, with the need for sustainable funding evident.

However, the survey also showed that sustainable funding was not being received by services. Key findings on funding included:

- 13% (17) of respondents has stopped running/closed an area of service due to lack of funding (132 services responding to this question). Nearly half of those services closed were children's services and refuges also had to be closed.
- 37% (49) of respondents were running services without dedicated funding (132 services responding to this question). 65% (32) of these 49 services were running services on their reserves, and 24% (12) of these were being run on a voluntary basis. Other ways that costs were met included through charity shops, appeals and other general community fundraising.

While it is vital that these services continue it is clear that running services without dedicated funding and using reserves is not sustainable for organisations which are trying to support women and children escape, cope and rebuild their lives after domestic violence. We are at risk of losing many of these services over the next few years as their reserves run out and no alternative funding is offered. This will only mean that fewer women and children are safe and will cost lives and the wealth of knowledge and experience that specialist organisations offer through their staff and volunteers is lost. The specialism of these staff also means that they are able to work in their community raising awareness of domestic violence, supporting the local police and other professionals and contributing to the development of their local violence against women and girls strategy.

A Year in the Life of Children and Young People's Services

2013/14: Key Findings

Domestic violence has a devastating impact on children and young people that can last into adulthood. They need specialist services to support them while their mother is also getting support.

The survey of children and young people domestic violence services in England showed that they were offering vital support to tens of thousands of children and young people in 2013/14.

- 15,627 children and young people were directly supported in this year by 100 services.
- 25,338 children and young people were indirectly supported in this year by 94 services.

Domestic violence can affect children and young people in different ways, they may experience trauma from witnessing domestic violence or have experienced it in their own relationships. The difficulties they face in coping and rebuilding their lives are vast and include having to move schools and losing friends if they have to move away. Specialist support is vital in meeting their specific needs yet often children and young people's services as those at most risk.

The survey also demonstrated the wide ranges of services that were offered to children and young people experiencing domestic violence, including resettlement and transitional support. These services included one-to-one sessions, homework support, children's groups, help finding a new school and help finding healthcare services.

1. 66% (64) of responding services were also providing prevention, education or awareness work (97 services responding to this question).
2. 66% of responding organisations also provided specific support to 16 and 17 year olds experiencing domestic violence (97 services responding to this question).

However, it was clear that these specialist children and young people's services experienced particular difficulties in supporting children and young people:

- 42% (38) of responding services reported difficulties in placing children living in refuges in schools (90 services responding to this question).

- 44% (40) of responding services had encountered problems in accessing mental health services for children and young people (90 services responding to this question).

Refuge and Outreach: A Moment in Time – Key Findings

A day in the life of refuge services: 26th June 2014

Specialist domestic violence refuges help women and children escape, cope and rebuild their lives after domestic violence. They offer the services they need to feel safe and cope with the trauma of domestic violence.

The picture of refuge services on 26th June 2014 showed thousands of women and children being supported in life-saving refuge accommodation.

- 1,791 women were supported in refuge accommodation on this day by 144 services.
- 1,669 children and young people were supported in refuge accommodation on this day by 140 services.

However, it also showed that not all women and children needing help were able to find it. On this one day 140 services turned away 112 women and 84 children because they weren't able to accommodate them. The main reason they could not be accommodated was no vacancies (for 74 of these women), but other reasons included that the woman needed another type of service or the service could not accommodate the woman's needs.

It also showed the impact of domestic violence on children and young people as, on this day, 136 services were supporting 1,144 children accommodated in refuge who had been forced to move schools as a consequence of domestic violence.

A week in the life of outreach services: 23rd June-27th June 2014 inclusive

Outreach services offer a valuable range of specialist information and support in a community setting. For some women support in the community is what they need to feel safe – support with legal advocacy and counselling can make the difference they need to cope and rebuild their lives.

The picture of outreach services in the week of 23rd-27th June 2014 showed thousands of women and children who were supported with a range of life-saving and life-changing services. The range of services offered by respondents included helplines, resettlement support, drop-in sessions and floating support.

- 6,393 women were supported in outreach services in this week by 107 services.
- 1,469 children and young people were directly supported, and 6,421 children and young people were supported indirectly (i.e. support was given to the mother) in this week by 107 services.

However, it also showed that there were women who needed these services that weren't able to access outreach support. In this week 369 women were turned away because of lack of capacity, by 87 services.

It also showed the impact of domestic violence on children and young people as, in this week, 97 services were supporting 708 children in outreach services who had been forced to move schools as a consequence of domestic violence.

Conclusion

This year's Women's Aid Annual Survey 2014 picture of the very real challenges women and their children escaping violence have to get help as services are being cut and support restricted. It shows the range of life-saving services to support them to escape and rebuild their lives after domestic violence. These services include floating support, counselling, outreach, refuge accommodation and specialist children and young people's services.

The survey also shows the impact of funding cuts and commissioning processes have had on domestic violence services as 13% of respondents had to close services and 37% of respondents were running services without any dedicated funding. The lack of sustainable funding to the domestic violence sector is extremely concerning and the cost of this is being met by women and children.

Alongside the funding cuts the survey clearly shows the constant demand for domestic violence services as women and children seek support to meet their needs. With nearly a third of all referrals to refuge services being declined due to lack of space there are women and children who aren't able to access the support they need and they will be in danger of further violence and for some the risk of being killed.

The value and unique role that children and young people's services play in offering specialist support to children and young people who have experienced violence in their own relationship or at home was also clear in the survey. These services offer specific support to children and young people and have their own particular challenges in accessing support for children and young people and getting them into schools. These services are also very vulnerable as nearly half of those 13% that had been closed were children and young people's services.

This year's Women's Aid Annual Survey clearly shows the range of support that domestic violence services provided to thousands of women and children throughout the year. The survey also paints a concerning picture of continued demand for domestic violence services, with increased pressure on services due to funding cuts and commissioning processes. It also shows the commitment and dedication of those that work in domestic violence services across the country as they continue to run services, sometimes without any dedicated funding, so women and children can access the much-needed support and protection they offer.