

THE DOMESTIC ABUSE REPORT 2019

THE ANNUAL AUDIT

REPORT SUMMARY





Authors

Sarah Davidge and Lizzie Magnusson

Research and Evaluation Team, Women's Aid

With support from Women's Aid staff

Acknowledgments

Thank you to all the domestic abuse services who have provided the vital data for this report through their responses to the Women's Aid Annual Survey and their use of On Track, the Women's Aid case management and outcomes monitoring database.

We are also grateful to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for its funding contribution to Routes to Support (the UK violence against women and girls service directory run in partnership with Women's Aid Federation of Northern Ireland, Scottish Women's Aid and Welsh Women's Aid) and the Women's Aid Annual Survey, and for its full funding of the No Woman Turned Away (NwTA) project. Thank you also to London Councils for supporting additional data collection and analysis of information from London refuges on provision and use of refuge services. London Councils is committed to fighting for more resources for London and getting the best possible deal for London's 33 councils. To read about London Councils' grants funding and the work of some of the groups they support please visit www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/services/grants. Data from all these sources contribute to this report.

This report was independently researched and written by Women's Aid. Thanks also go to the staff at Women's Aid for all their support.

Published by:

Women's Aid Federation of England

PO Box 3245, Bristol, BS2 2EH

© Women's Aid 2019

Women's Aid is the national charity working to end domestic abuse against women and children. Over the past 44 years, Women's Aid has been at the forefront of shaping and coordinating responses to domestic violence and abuse through practice, research and policy. We empower survivors by keeping their voices at the heart of our work, working with and for women and children by listening to them and responding to their needs. We are a federation of over 180 organisations who provide just under 300 local 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. We hold the largest national data set on domestic abuse, and use research and evidence to inform all of our work. 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. Our range of online services, which include the Survivors' Forum, help hundreds of thousands of women and children every year.

Foreword

Domestic abuse costs society a staggering £66bn each year (Oliver et al, 2019), much of which is a result of the physical and emotional harm to survivors. It is clear that domestic abuse is a massive societal issue. Yet, as this report shows, specialist domestic abuse services continue to face funding cuts and funding uncertainty. These life-saving and life-changing services are trying to do 'more with less' and keep going despite the tough economic climate. As one organisation told us of their work over the previous year, "...despite the challenges that we face on a daily basis with funding and statutory services we continued to provide a valued service to victims and their children because we know that they need us and our services make a difference."

Despite welcome emergency pots of funding from the government, uncertain budgets are making the work of domestic abuse services harder every year. Many organisations are running an area of their services without any dedicated funding at all. Some receive no financial support at all from their local authority; nearly one in ten refuges and one in five community-based services who responded to our annual survey reported that they received no local authority funding in 2017/18.

The financial challenges facing these organisations of course have an impact on the services they are able to offer. Just under a third of services responding to our annual survey have had to reduce the amount of support they are able to provide to each survivor since 2014, due to funding issues. Furthermore, services are telling us that they are struggling to meet the high demand for the support they offer and are, as a result, having to turn women and children away. One service told us that their biggest challenge was, "Capacity – we have had an

unsustainable increase in referrals from police – if this trend continues we would need to double in size within five years." Almost 60% of all referrals to refuge services in 2017–18 were declined (for any reason). Over one in six of these referrals were declined due to a lack of space or capacity to support the survivor. Formal counselling service types (an important element of therapeutic support) have declined in number; there were 17 fewer of these service types in England in May 2018 than there had been the previous year. The number of refuge spaces continues to fall short of minimum standards recommended by the Council of Europe (by 1,715 bed spaces in May 2018). We also know that organisations are struggling to retain qualified staff in a climate of demanding workloads and uncertainty over future funds.

Services responding to our annual survey were rightly proud of the work they do in not only saving lives, but also transforming them. As one organisation told us, "Being able to see survivors on their own journey of change, living a life free from abuse and fear is rewarding. The positive impact that our support has on the wider family as well as the survivor."

If we do not meet the needs of survivors and their children when they first reach out for help, more women and children's lives will be put at risk and the costs to society will only spiral. We know that accessing specialist support is often the difference between the survivor and her children escaping domestic abuse or being trapped with the abuser. By investing even just a fraction of the money domestic abuse costs society in our network of specialist services, we can make sure that every survivor and child can rebuild their lives free from fear and abuse.

Introduction

The Domestic Abuse Report 2019: The Annual Audit presents information on domestic abuse services in England, and the women and children they support. This report examines the work of these services in 2017–18 through analysis of statistics about service provision and the survivors using those services, along with survey responses from service professionals.

1. The service users

Information about service users for this report was taken from On Track, the Women's Aid case management and outcomes monitoring database. We use cases closed during the year 1st April 2017 - 31st March 2018. Our sample group for this report consists of 18,895 female survivors who were supported by 49 organisations running domestic abuse services in England, using On Track during 2017–2018. On Track is currently used by over 60 local service providers throughout England. Services contribute to a national dataset by recording information on women's experiences of abuse, the support they are offered and the outcomes achieved. It is important to note that in this report we are looking at those women who have successfully accessed support services. There are many other survivors of domestic abuse who, for a variety of reasons, are unable to access specialist help or delay asking for help for a long time.

Many of the service users had experienced abuse for a long time. The length of abuse ranged from one month to 60 years and the average length of abuse experienced was just under six years¹. The vast majority of perpetrators (93.1%) recorded on On Track were male². The most common form of abuse experienced was emotional abuse (94.1%). 68.7% had been subjected to jealous or controlling behaviour.

There was a large number of children (22,479) involved with domestic abuse services in 2017–18, either directly through support given to children and young people or indirectly through support given to their mothers. There were, on average, 1.2 children per service user; 58.3% of service users in 2017–18 had children and 6.6% were pregnant.

.....

1 Calculated using the cases of those experiencing current abuse (experiencing/has experienced abuse within the last year); out of 10,727 service users.

2 For cases of female domestic abuse service users.

Of those service users who were not British nationals (2,531 service users), only just over half (55.1%) were able to access public funds³ (ie. they were eligible for state benefits). Many more survivors will not have been able to access specialist support because they had 'no recourse to public funds'. Refugees are usually reliant on state benefits to fund the housing element of their service, and so can only accept referrals for survivors who can access state benefits (if no alternative funds can be found). Some community-based services also cannot accept clients with 'no recourse to public funds' (depending on how they are funded). Only 5.8% of refuge vacancies posted to the Routes to Support directory in the year 2017–18 would even consider a woman who had no recourse to public funds.

Older women are underrepresented in domestic abuse support services, as we have also seen in previous findings from the Women's Aid Annual Survey. Only 3.4% of service users in 2017–18 were aged 61 and over, despite evidence to suggest that domestic abuse is just as significant an issue for older women as it is for younger women (Blood, 2004; Femicide Census, 2016, 2017 & 2018; Mouton et al, 2004; O'Keeffe et al, 2007).

2. The provision of services

Information on the provision of services is taken from Routes to Support, the UK violence against women and girls directory of services and refuge vacancies, run in partnership by Scottish Women's Aid, Welsh Women's Aid, Women's Aid Federation of England and Women's Aid Federation of Northern Ireland. This report includes information about the services in England only, from snapshots taken at 1st May each year. The directory is updated on a rolling basis by dedicated staff at Women's Aid, meaning each entry is fully updated every year, in addition to any updates received from services during the year.

Providers of domestic abuse services in England deliver a range of service types to meet the needs of survivors and their children, including prevention and educational work, refuge services, and support based in the community. As at May 2018 there were 219 domestic abuse service providers in England listed on Routes to Support; these organisations were running 363 local services between them throughout England. The trend towards fewer, larger contracts for domestic abuse services

.....

3 The government website describes 'no recourse to public funds' in the following way: "If you have a residence permit that allows you to live in the UK, it may include the condition that you have no recourse to public funds. If so, it means you will not be able to claim most benefits, tax credits or housing assistance that are paid by the state." (HM Government, 2014).

identified in last year's report (Women's Aid, 2017A) has continued. The majority (65.8%) of local domestic abuse support services are now run by dedicated providers⁴.

Of these local services available in England in May 2018, 271 ran refuge services. The number of refuge bed spaces in England falls short of the minimum number recommended by the Council of Europe⁵ by 1,715 bed spaces⁶, despite a rise of 15 bed spaces in the year ending May 2018 to 3,847 bed spaces in total. However, the availability of bed spaces varies by region and not all these bed spaces are accessible for all women. Just under half of refuge vacancies posted on Routes to Support in 2017–18 could accommodate a woman with two children, and even fewer (under one-fifth) could accommodate a woman with three children. During 2017–18 only 1.0% of vacancies were in rooms fully accessible for wheelchairs and a further 1.2% were suitable for someone with limited mobility. Only 17.3% of all refuge services have a specialist mental health support worker(s), 8.9% have a specialist drug use worker(s) and 8.9% have a specialist alcohol use worker(s). During 2017–18 only 5.8% of vacancies could consider women who had 'no recourse to public funds'.

A small proportion of services provide specialist provision around a particular protected characteristic⁷, such as ethnicity, age or sexuality. There are 36 refuges in England which are run specifically for a particular group of women, including 30 refuge services for Black and Minority Ethnic women (these BME services are mostly located in London).

There was a decrease in the number of most service types in 2017–18. The reduction in therapeutic support in 2017-18 is of particular concern, with a loss of 18.1%⁸ of formal counselling services during the year.

.....
4 Organisations constituted solely for the purpose of delivering violence against women and girls (VAWG) support services.

5 Council of Europe (2008): "...safe accommodation in specialised women's shelters, available in every region, with one family place per 10,000 head of population." (p. 51).

6 A bed space in a refuge service is a unit of accommodation for one woman and her children (one household), regardless of how many beds or cots are in the unit.

7 The Equality Act 2010 (<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/protected-characteristics>) protects against discrimination based on age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. These are known as protected characteristics.

8 A loss of 17 services out of 94 at May 2017.

3. The work of support services

Information on the work of support services in 2017-2018, comes from the Women's Aid Annual Survey. The survey is sent to all domestic abuse services in England, including both refuge services and those services based in the community. 134 organisations running 208 service entries on Routes to Support responded to this year's survey. This gives a response rate of 57.3%.

Services are experiencing high demand for their specialist support. Using figures from the Women's Aid Annual Survey 2018, we estimate community-based services in England accepted 136,165 referrals in 2017-18 and that refuge services accepted 12,034 referrals. However, refuge services responding to the annual survey declined 59.7% of the referrals they received. 17.1% of all referrals to responding refuge services were declined due to lack of space/capacity to support the survivor. An estimated 21,084 referrals to all refuge services in England were declined in 2017-18⁹. It is important to also bear in mind that the number of survivors who could have benefited from support in these services is likely to be even greater than the 'referrals declined' figures given above suggest.

Funding continues to be an area of big concern for services. As in previous annual surveys, 'funding cuts and uncertainties' was the most frequently mentioned theme when responding to their biggest challenge in 2017-18 (cited by 54.5% of respondents). Services commented about funding being reduced or removed, uncertainty around the source of future funding, and the challenge of managing short-term funding, often from multiple sources. 56.7% of respondents were running an area of their domestic abuse service without any dedicated funding in 2017-18 (this is a higher proportion than in 2016-17, when the figure was 46.3%). The most common area of work being run without dedicated funding was therapeutic support services (for example counselling and group work). 9.1% of respondents wrote that they received no local authority funding for their refuge service(s) for women and 20.6% of respondents wrote that they received no local authority funding for their community-based service(s) for women in 2017-18.

Respondents also talked about challenges in staffing, including difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified staff (with short-term funding contracts and overloaded roles), and the problems of staff 'burnout'. Around a third responded that they had had increasing difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff since 2014.¹⁰ Just under a third responded that, since 2014, they had had to reduce the amount of support (in terms of staff time) they were able to give to each service user due to funding. Almost a quarter

9 It is important to note that these numbers do not include those survivors who were not referred because the referring agency already knew the refuge was full or could not meet the survivor's specific support need (eg around drugs/alcohol support).

10 In response to a 'tick-box' question about changes since 2014.

(23.9%) of respondents indicated that they have had to rely increasingly on unpaid volunteers since 2014.¹¹

In response to a question about what they were most proud of during the year 2017-18, respondents commented on being proud of:

- ▶ the resilience of their service in a difficult funding environment;
- ▶ empowering women and supporting their long-term recovery;
- ▶ expanding their service into a new area;
- ▶ the commitment and hard work of their staff and volunteers;
- ▶ diversity, either in the services they provide or the survivors they support.

Conclusion

In 2017-18, there were a wide range of services supporting high numbers of survivors, and their children. Many of these survivors had experienced domestic abuse for a long time, with the average length of abuse experienced being just under six years. Demand for domestic abuse services continues to exceed capacity, with many women and children having to be turned away from the support and safety these services offer. There remains a shortfall in refuge bed spaces available (according to minimum standards set by the Council of Europe) in spite of some increase in the number of bed spaces over the year. Funding continues to be a key challenge for domestic abuse services, but services are proud of the resilience they have shown to keep services open in tough economic times.

.....
11 In response to 'tick-box' questions about changes since 2014.

The Domestic Abuse Report 2019: The Annual Audit - Report Summary

Women's Aid Federation of England,
PO Box 3245, Bristol, BS2 2EH
T: 0117 944 4411 F: 0117 924 1703

E: info@womensaid.org.uk W: www.womensaid.org.uk www.thehideout.org.uk

© Women's Aid 2019